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THE TWO SERENADERS FROM CROSS CRICK, YOU BET BOB AND ARIZONA CY.

You-Bet Bob's Jangle;

OR,

SNAP-SHOT SAM'S SURPRISE.

BY ARIZONA CY.

CHAPTER I.

THE BELATED PARSON.

"Bob," said I to my pard one fine morning, "thar is goin' to be a weddin' over to Wagonpole."

"A weddin'?" says Bob, sorter sniffin' fun from afar, like unto a war horse a-sniffin' of battle. "A weddin'? Who is goin' to get hitched up over thar?"

"The delusionated parties are the Widow McKorkle, derelect of the late Budd McKorkle, and a galoot they call Snap-shot Sam," I answered him. "They say it is goin' to be a big event, and we'd better go over."

"I think we better had," agreed my pard. "We attended the holiday doin's over to Hold-up, we wur at the funeral of Gunsight John over to Sawbuck City, and if we are goin' to remain in the social swim we can't afford to miss a weddin' over to Wagonpole, nohow."

We wur of one mind.

Bein' agreed, we forthwith made our preparations.

We stove-blacked our boots, hunted up a comb, and curried the burrs out of our hair, and havin' put a snack in our pockets we straddles our burros and sot out over the mountain in the direction of our destination.

Wagonpole Camp is a good all-day's ride from Cross Crick, and the shades of night wur fallin' when we rode into town. We wur nigh about plum tucked out, and durin' the past two hours my pard had been spittin' cotton and longin' fur a drink, and the first thing he done was to roll off'n his burro and make a run fur the highest swill-trough.

That is You-bet Bob's one failin', and I heartily wish I could break him of it, but I reckon it's bred in the bone. I followed more leisure-like, and was just in time to stop him from makin' a hog of himself entire.

I yanked the bottle away from him and finished it to keep him from takin' more'n was good fer him.

We couldn't expect to be of much account till we had filled in, that is to say—had supper, so we hollered aloud fer grub.

After we had satisfied the cravin's of the inner man, we felt prime bubblin', like unto bottles filled with new wine—as my pard expressed it poetically.

The way that supper livened us up was amazin'.

"Now then, whur's that weddin' at?" Bob asked.

"Down to Widder McKorkle's," answered the proprietor of the shebang whur we fed.

"And what time is it to come off?" I further questioned. "Ye see, we have come all the way over from Cross Crick to attend it and do it up fur the Howler."

"The Howler?" he howled, and there was fire in his eye and his hand sorter sneaked hipwards. I seen at a glance that he had a grudge of some sort, or a grievance.

"Hold on!" I hollered plenty prompt. "I ain't the editor! If anything is wrong, you will have to go over to Cross Crick and beard the lion in his den. I know he'll be glad to see ye, and will greet ye plenty warm. Don't waste good powder on me."

"Lucky fer you that ye ain't him, is

all," simmered down the man, leavin' his gun whur it was at. "I have got a pill fer him when I meet him."

"Keep it till ye do meet him, then," said I, makin' a mental notch fur the thirteenth man who was gunnin' fur that editor, and feelin' myself one step nearer to his chair.

I expect to be editor of the Howler as soon as I can work our people up to the point of killing off the present incumbent. As fer Bob, my pard, you will learn more about him as we go along. I am trying to break him in to take my place when I get to be editor.

By the way, before I get further into the turmoil of what I have to write about, I must mention that I do my spellin' more by sound than by science, that is to say, I write words about as we speak 'em out hyer, regardless of rules and regulations, and ditto respectin' the small matters of syntax and grammar. Me and the editor had a kick-up over these very matters.

He bought a dictionary and insisted that I should paste it in my hat, or wear it around my neck, and consult it early and often. I tried it, but it wouldn't work. Huntin' up spellin' and sich like, I lost the thread of what I wanted to say, and I reckon I would 'a' been a plum idiot by this time if I had kept on. Besides, our readers got to kickin' so hard that the editor had to cave and let me go on in my own style and blissful ignorance.

You see, the boys wanted their readin' and their speakin' language to bear somethin' like second-cousin relationship to each other, at least, and so I discarded the dictionary and struck out at my old pace; and the result has been that the Howler has more readers to-day than any other half-dozen papers combined, hyerabouts. So, if my spellin' is a little out of alignment at times, 'specially when the action is lively, and if the jingle of my syntax isn't always in harmony, don't pay any attention to such trifles; foller the trail.

"But, about that weddin'; when is it to come off?" asked You-bet.

"Why, it is to come off jist as soon as the parson arrives," said the man. "He has been expected fur two hours back, but he ain't yet put in his appear."

"And whur is this charmin' widdy's bungalow?" I asked him further. "Me and my pard might as well go on and git acquainted, I suppose. We want to be right on hand when the fun begins."

"Go out and look down the street and ye can't miss it," said he. "It is all ablaze with lights, and mebbly you'll hear singin' down in that direction. They expect to have a big time as soon as the job is done, and Wagonpole is goin' to celebrate. It's queer that parson don't git hyer."

"We'll find it all right, I don't doubt," concluded my pard. "Come along, Cy, and we'll see if we can't scare some fun out of this thing. It will be the first time on record that we ever failed, if we don't git the worth of our money hyer. Come on, and we'll pay our respects to the widdy and Snap-shot, anyhow."

So, we meandered out and ambled off. Once outside, we seen a house that showed up more lights 'n all the rest, and we laid straight trail fer that one.

When we got thar we knocked at the door sorter nerlite.

"That's him!" we heard the hull roomful whisper out 'loud; but et wasn't the him they meant.

The widdy herself opened the door, and when she seen it wasn't the parson her face sorter clouded. I sorter weak-

ened, and might 'a' backed out if I had been alone.

"How do?" said Bob, steppin' right up as brash as could be. "Hope you are all well and myself enjoyin' the same blessin'. We have come all the way from Cross Crick to see this hyer weddin'."

"Cross Crick?"

She fairly exploded in the sayin'.

It looked as if the fame of our fair city, or mebbly our own reputation, had gone before us.

"Ther same," said I, meekly, in support of my pard, "and all fur the purpose of gettin' some interestin' facts about this grand occasion to write it up fur the Howler."

"Howler!"

"Jist so," said I, as bland as New Mexico mush without any trimmin'; "and I'll write it up in a way to do ye proud, I promise. But, where is the happy man of your choice? We want to congratulate him."

That smoothed her feathers, so to say, and Snap-shot was brought forward and introduced.

He was a long, lean, bony man, maybe forty years of age—nearer forty-five, to be exact; with a skin as brown as Arizona sun and wind could make it.

He had a bad eye, and his reputation with his guns was somethin' terrible, if all was true that was said of him; but a smile of peace sat supreme on his classic countenance jist then.

As fur the widdy, she was fat and forty, and while she showed considerable signs of wear and tear, was still quite a passable woman withal, as wimmin in these parts go. She was no spring chicken; neither was she a fairy, by any means.

Well, me and Bob got in with the company and had a good time while they waited for the parson. They had somethin' in a bottle which they passed around, and I noticed that Bob sampled it plenty strong when it came his turn. Then they had some singin', and there was a feller on hand with a fiddle to give 'em a dance tune as soon as the knot was tied.

But at the end of another hour the parson hadn't yet dayboo'd, and finally Snap-shot put on his hat to go out and take a squint around to see if he could sight him. He hadn't been gone more'n a minute when there came a weak knock at the door, and when the widdy opened the door there stood a pale little man in a starched collar and white tie, and by the brands he exhibited we knowed at sight that he was the man.

CHAPTER II.

BOB IN A BOX.

"Is—is this the place where the wedding is to be?" the little man inquired.

His face was almost as pale as his shirt, and tenderfoot was writ all over him in letters a foot high, so to say.

He looked skart, and it was mebbly five seconds before he had found his tongue to say anything. I felt sorry fer him, fer I was a tenderfoot myself a good many years ago, and knowed jist how he felt.

"It is," said the widdy, prompt as a pistol.

"Well, I am the minister from Slabville," as he stepped timidly in and made us all a nice bow. "I am late, owing to the fact that I lost my road, but I will try to make amends for that by hurryin'—"

He was fairly tremblin' in his nervousness, and while he was flounderin' around tryin' to say somethin' one of the boys slipped out to fetch Snap-shot. He was

as brand new as you ever see, and I suppose the big boots and red shirts and hip-upholstered guns of that crowd discomfited him.

His comin' had sorter made the rest of us feel oneasy, too, and even the widdy was somewhat flurried as she made a show of introducin' him. I take it that she wanted to be perlte to company, so she faced the pale little man to my pard and made mention of his name first, no doubt intendin' to give me second honor, as I sot next, and so on around while they waited fer Sam.

"This is Mr. Bob Horner, You-bet Bob, from Cross Crick," she said; and she was goin' to say more, but the parson interrupted.

"I am pleased to know you, Mr. Horner," he said. "I humbly beg your pardon for this delay, but being a stranger in the country it was a misfortune to which I was liable—"

"Don't mention et, pardner," said Bob, holding out his horny hand. "Put et thar."

The parson looked plum foolish.

"Put—put what there?" he sorter faltered.

"Why, yer paddle," iterated Bob, offerin' his hand. "Shake!"

Then the parson caught on and laid his dainty white hand in Bob's big brow one, and by jing I thought Bob would crush it!

Ther parson lifted himself on one foot and grinned with pain, and I gave Bob my elbow plenty hard in the ribs to make him let go; and that thar little incident served to make the parson all the more 'citable.

He fumbled fer a little book that he carried in his hip pocket, which sign ther company mistook, and in one second a dozen brawny hands wur laid holt on him plenty hard. He looked as helpless as a baby and ready to faint with fright, and I believe he was ready to cry, too.

"Don't yer pull!" said one big man. "He didn't go ter pinch ye; he will beg yer parding."

"I—I am not pulling," said the gospel sharp.

"And yer musn't."

"I—I guess you don't understand."

"What is yer hand thar at yer hip fer?"

"I—I—I am getting my ritual out of my pocket," gasped the sky pilot.

"Yer—yer what?"

"My ritual—a book."

"Oh!" said ther crowd, all together, and a big sigh of relief went up.

"We didn't rightly understand ye," explained the big man; and he added: "On yer life, mister, carry et in yer open hand hereafter."

They all sat down again, sorter ashamed of their mistake, and the parson pulled out his little book; and by that time he was tremblin' so that he could hardly open it.

He was turribly rattled, and was plenty perspirin'.

"I beg your pardon, sir, I beg your pardon, I beg your pardon," he said to Bob. "Will you take this lady by the hand?"

By his nervousness he had made all the rest of us uneasy, and hardly a man of us was on a level base, I opine. The widdy, too, was away, off and sorter flustered.

"I'm the most willin' feller to oblige that you ever see," assured my pard, as he got up and offered his big paw to ther bride elect.

He was somewhat under the influence of—that long ride and the hearty supper right on top of it, and didn't fully appreciate the importance of the 'casion.

As fer the widdy, she looked alarmed, sorter, and her eyes turned to the door. Everybody was laborin' more or less under the excitement of that book incident, more or less full of pity fer the parson, too, and all wondered what sort of preliminary business was goin' to be done.

The poor parson was eager and anxious to make amends fer his tardy appear, and more so to shake the dust of Wagon-pole Camp off'n his sandals—so to say, as I kin see it now. He asked some hurried questions only half-understood, to which Bob nodded to some and the widdy to some, while the rest of us looked on and wondered; till at last he sorter got his grip onto the subject and said louder:

"Then I now do pronounce you man and wife, and—"

It struck me like lightnin', then, and ther widdy at the same instant; and she jerked her hand away in a hurry jist as I jumped up and hollered:

"Hold on! Fur heaven sakes, hold on! You have got the wrong man thar, parson!"

That parson went paler'n death instanter.

Bob sorter roused up, at that, and a cold sweat stood out on his forehead.

Ther widdy looked as if she wanted to faint, but had fergot how, and 'peared to want a hole to crawl into.

"The—the wrong man?" gasped the poor parson, his jaw swingin' limber and his eyes fairly bulgin' out of their sockets. "Why, I thought this was the person—"

"What right had you to think anything about et?" I thundered—or as near to et as I could come.

"I—I was introduced—"

"What has that got to do with it?" I hollered, anxious fer Bob's sake and wantin' to git him out of his diffikilty before Snap-shot Sam made his appear.

"I—I—I—"

"This ain't no time to stutter about et," I minded him. "You might as well speak fer a coffin."

"I—I thought it was the person; the lady introduced him the first of all, and as I had kept the company waiting so long, —I—I—I—"

"You thought you would marry the first man you lit onto, hey?"

"But, I am blameless—"

"Well, go back and ondo et, quicker'n scat," I ordered him.

"Unfortunately, it—it has gone too far; I have pronounced the couple man and wife."

The widdy screamed, at that, and flopped down onto a chair with a force that almost crushed it to the floor, and Bob gasped like a dyin' fish.

"Ma—ma—married!"

Everybody looked at everybody, and ther situation was painful in the extreme.

"Great goshaway!" I bellered. "What is goin' to be done?"

"I—I—I am helpless," gasped the parson. "I can't do anything; it is too late."

"But, et ain't been done a minnit!" I argued. "Do somethin'—anything! You have got my pard into a fix, and by goshaway, you have got to git him out of it!"

"But, I—I—I—"

"You will, or by the jumpin' Jupiter Pluvius if I don't—"

I pulled a long gun on him, and down onto his knees he dropped in a way that made some of the company laugh.

"Don't kill him!" interposed Bob. "He is ther one that done ther mischief, and he is my only hope to git out of it, I

eckon." And I never see Bob look so sollum.

"Parson," says I, much impressive, "mistakes don't go. You had better declare it off, if you value your life."

"Impossible, impossible," he gasped.

"It will be all up with ye, the minnit Snap-shot Sam appears to claim his bride. Thar will be one quick snap, and your speerit will waft its way to the realms of delight—"

But, even that prospect hadn't no charms fer the parson, jist then. He put up his hands in the most helpless way you ever see, and implored us to save him, as if he was the one that needed savin' jist then. It was my pard that was in the soup. And jist at that minnit ther door opened and into the room stepped Snap-shot Sam!

CHAPTER III.

FLINGIN' THER GAUNTLET.

Tableau!

That's what it was, fur fair.

Snap-shot stood and looked about him in a dazed manner, wonderin' what had busted.

Thar was the fat and forty widdy, in a state of collapse on the chair onto which she had dropped, tryin' feebly to fan herself.

On his knees was the parson, whose name, by the way, was Slimpsky, and the look on his scared face was ad to behold. His teeth wur fairly chatterin' like he had ague.

And thar was my pard, clear plum lam-doozled, and wonderin' whur he was at, anyhow. Mebby I wasn't much better myself. And all the rest of the company sorter castin' their eyes around to see what the chance fur escape was before the ball opened.

I whispered to my pard:

"Take a header out the rear window; et's yer only chance."

"Et's too late," whined Bob. "He'd snap me before I could turn on my heel. See that I'm fair planted, Cy."

That was all we had time to say.

"What is ther meanin' of this hyer?" bellered out Snap-shot Sam, his dark face darker still, and his bad eyes takin' in everything in sight.

"Spare me! Oh! spare me!" cried Parson Slimpsky.

He held out his hands as he knelt thar on his knees, and he looked a pictur' of distress.

"What's ther matter wi' you?" vociferated Snap-shot, vociferously.

"I am blameless—blameless!"

"Jist what a parson had orter be," declared ther bridegroom. "Git up off'n yer knees and 'tend to business, now. We didn't call ye hyer to hold a meetin', nur nothin' like that. Git up!"

The parson got up, but his knees gimbleled wuss'n Bob's.

"Come, Susan!" said Snap-shot, holdin' out his hand to ther widdy.

But ther widdy didn't come. Bein' a married woman, how could she? I tell ye I trembled!

"What's ther matter wi' ye?" cried Snap-shot, gettin' ruffled. "You are too old a hen to play off bashful. Git up hyer!"

That was whar Snap-shot made the mistake of his life—speakin' of her age in that indefinite manner, and right afore all the company at that. I seen her eyes snap.

She sot the harder on her chair, and didn't obey worth a cent.

My pard looked limber and seasick, as he seen Snap-shot's dander was risin'.

Ther parson was perspirin' freely, a

cold sweat like that on a corpse jist off the ice.

"What in ginger ails ye?" roared the Snapper. "Don't ye mean ter marry me, after all, Susan McKorkle? Ef ye don't—"

"I can't!" gasped ther widdy. "I am already married!"

"Married?" and Snap-shot had a gun in each hand, instanter.

The way he glared around was enough to make yer blood run cold.

Every galoot of us seemed to shrink into himself, and over keeled ther parson in a dead faint.

Then Snap-shot fixed his gaze onto ther widdy, and with a yell she jumped up and threwed herself onto the manly bosom of my pard.

"Save me!" she cried. "I am yours; we are married hard and fast. I demand the protection of my lawful wedded husband! Take me and defend me with yer life!"

You had orter seen my pard!

I thought he would foller the lead of the parson, and kerflummix.

"Married to him!" yowled Snap-shot, loud as he could holler. "Married to that galoot?"

Takin' a quick think, I had to approve the woman's hoss sense in the matter and her action.

My pard was head and shoulders better lookin' 'n Snap-shot Sam, and was a heap more of a man every way you could put it, 'cept notoriety.

But, Bob wasn't the marryin' kind.

He tried to entwine the loving arms that had been throwed around him.

"It was all a mistake," he declared. "I'm not 'sponsible fur a blunder that was made."

"But, you can't get out of it," urged the widdy—that was. "We are married hard and fast, and you are the one I want!"

"I yield ther claim!" hollered Bob, desprut. "Take her off'n my hands, Snap-shot; she's your'n, spite of all the parsons and their blunders. I am out of it!"

But, the woman only hung on the harder.

"Susan, d'ye hear?" cried Snap-shot.

"I tell ye I'm married," said she.

"Then I'll durn soon onmarry ye and make ye a widdy ag'in!" sort o' snarled Snap-shot.

He tried to take a squint at my pard, but Bob had the good sense to shelter himself well behind his bulwark.

He embraced ther widdy—now his wife, and kept her 'tween himself and the ireful Snap-shot, so that Snap couldn't see a spot of him big enough to shoot at.

"Don't shoot!" he solicited. "Don't shoot!"

"I'll show ye!"

"He didn't go to do it," said I. "It was that fool parson; he sprung it on 'em, mistakin' the man."

"Mistakin' the man?"

"Exact."

"But, nobody ever mistook Snap-shot Sam before."

"He was too plum excited to know what he was about. He went off 'fore he was ready."

"Et's a lie! You fellers have put up a job on me! I kin lick any two galoots that ever hailed from Cross Crick, and I'll lick you!"

I was plenty alarmed; his name fer a bad man was wide known.

"I leave it to the widdy," said I.

"I want you to know that I ain't a widdy no longer," asserted Susan, bridlin' right up.

"But you mighty soon will be, if you

ain't," 'sured Snap-shot, hot in the collar.

"And you ain't married to me, either," sputtered Bob. "Mistakes don't go, and this was all a big mistake—a flunk deal."

"Mebby it was, but it binds, and I am your wife. Who is goin' to untie the knot? I can't legally marry anybody else, so you must take me up, fer better or fer wuss."

"I am goin' to git ye out of that fix, Susan, by makin' ye a widdy again," insinuated Snap-shot, in cold blood. "No hoss-thief from Cross Crick kin come hyer and rob me of a bride—not much he can't!"

"You call me a hoss-thief?" yelled my pard.

"Yes, a double-dyed cutthroat and hoss-thief combined!"

"Whur's that person at?" squealed Bob.

I knowed his blood was up; it showed behind his ears.

This reminded us all to look fur the parson, and he was jist creepin' out the back way.

"Hold on, thar!" I bellered at him, bringin' a gun to play on him. "You aire wanted hyer, so don't be in a hurry."

He looked sneaky, and came back.

I thought he would drop dead, that pale he was.

"What is it?" he feebly inquired. "I must be on my way; I have other business—"

"Your business is right hyer," spoke up Snap-shot Sam. "You have got to undo what ye have done, and do it over again."

"But that is impossible," gasped the parson. "I have made a fatal error, and one that cannot be righted save only by due process of law. It is very unfor—"

"Do ye say she is mine?" demanded my pard.

"She is your wife, sir, much as I deplore the mistake that has been made."

"And if it wasn't that you have got to do the job over, I would drop ye in yer tracks," declared Snap-shot, ugly as Satan in his face.

"If she actually is mine, I am goin' to claim her," declared my pard. "You'll find that Cross Crick is in the bandwagon, every time!—you fellers here. It's You-bet Bob who is crackin' now!"

And thar they hitched, and their lives hung in the balance, suspended by a thread, as it wur.

CHAPTER IV.

THINGS REACHING A CLIMAX.

Snap-shot had made two mistakes; referrin' to the widdy's age and callin' my pard a hoss-thief.

I looked at my pard.

There was a grim glint in his off eye, but he still took care to protect himself behind the late McKorkle's derelect.

Snap-shot looked like an untamed tiger, and I knowed he was only on the lookout fur a spot to shoot at on my pard's anatomy, no matter whar if it was only as big as a button.

The parson tried to sneak again; but Snap-shot reached out and grabbed him by one ear, and I thought he meant to run his pistol down his throat.

"You stay right hyer!" he ordered. "You have tangled things up, and you have got to ontangle 'em; dy ye hear? Anyhow, you have got another knot to tie."

"Impossible; it is done—"

"And it has got to be undone! You can marry a widdy to a single man, can't ye?"

"Yes; but—"

"No but about it! Don't you try to slope off, that's all!"

He let the parson go with that warnin', and turned his attention to my pard again.

"Now, then, you Cross Crick cayote!" he bawled. "Come out from behind that petticoat and show yourself!"

I had noticed that my pard had got out a gun.

His answer to that was to thrust it under the fat arm of his wife said-to-be and blaze away, and he kem within an ace of sendin' Snap-shot off to the cemetery in a box.

As it was, though, he missed, and the bullet found its bed in the wall, and there was a general tumblin' out of doors and windows on the part of them that hadn't already levanted.

Meantime the word had gone forth that the widdy was married, and the committee in charge of the doin's wur whoopin' it up fur fair in the direction of the camp center, shootin' their guns and settin' off some fireworks Snap-shot himself had provided.

It was enough to make any man mad, you will allow.

Not only had he lost his bride, as it seemed, but there was a jubilee mainly at his expense for the racket.

Snap-shot couldn't fire back without shootin' through the woman to hit my pard, so he done the next best thing and shot at me!

I was jist quick enough to detect his intention and drop, and so I lived to tell of it, and jist then my pard tried another at him that kem closter than the first—just blazed his nose.

Snap-shot was no fool, and seein' that he was in fer it, he made a charge.

With a jump to the right, he lifted his arm to bore my pard, there bein' now plenty of room for him, and he would have salted him, too, only fer me.

I let out with my left foot, sudden-like, and kicked up his arm, and the gun went flyin' bang up to the celin' and went off harmless; and seein' that he was lame in the fight, Snap-shot vamosed as quick as a cat seein' a terrier.

First he dived under the table, stumbled over a chair, then went out the door like he was shot from a gun.

Havin' an interest in not harmin' the woman, and knowin' that he couldn't git at my pard jist then without doin' that, and that his safety depended on his quickness, he was lively, I tell ye!

But that wouldn't be the end of it, as I well knowed.

He would turn the minnit he was out, and under cover of the dark would pick my pard off at first sight.

To block that game, I took my hat and waved out the light, and made the room as dark as a black hole in darkest Africa, instanter, and fer the time bein' Bob was safe.

"Thank heavens!" I heard the woman exclaim.

"Now, ma'm, please unbuckle—that is, let go yer fond embrace," said my pard.

"Have ye no fonder word fer me, after riskin' my life to save yours?" she demanded, reproachfully.

"I'm much 'bliged to ye, I'm sure," confessed Bob, "but now that the danger is over I'll try and take care of myself."

"You mean to claim me as your woman?"

"You heard what I said."

"I know you said so, but, did ye mean it?"

"Do you suppose I'd give you up to him, after what he called me?"

"That is what I wanted to hear you say. You are worth two of Snap-shot, and we must salt him."

"But, madam, think of the mistake that has been made," urged I, chippin' in. "You wur pledged to marry Snap-shot, and you are duty bound to him—"

"And legally bound to another man," she interrupted. "I don't see no way out of it, even if I wanted to get out, which I don't. Mr. Horner is younger and better lookin'."

"But, good lands, Bob, you don't want a wife!" I gasped.

"Et seems I have got one," mourned Bob.

"And one that will stick to ye through thick and thin, too," averred the woman.

"I wouldn't kick, if he hadn't called me a hoss-thief," muttered Bob. "But he done that, and if he beats me in this game he has got to fight, that's all."

"And he insulted me, too," added the woman.

Hang my fiddle if I wasn't in a dilemma.

On the one hand I wanted to save my pard from the woman, and on the other hand I wanted to save him from the wrath of Snap-shot.

It was a delicate position to be in, and the more so when Bob was in about as bad a fix himself—in fact, he was right in it up to the tips of his ears, and I didn't see no way out of it.

Suppose he downed Snap-shot, what then?

He would be bound to the woman as tight as wax, and there would be no one to take her off his hands.

As it stood, Snap-shot couldn't legally marry her without first killing off my pard, and I was on hand to object to that fer all I was worth. The hull game wasn't worth it.

What to do I didn't know.

I wanted to get Bob aside to talk to him and instill some sense.

"But, can't my pard buy off?" I asked the woman. "He don't really want ye, and it was all a mistake—"

"That don't alter the fact that he has got me," said she. "I am now a married woman—you heard the parson declare it, and my duty is to cling to my husband."

"But, SSnap-shot will kill him," I insisted, "and then you will be a widdy again."

"We must escape him," said she.

"How?"

"We must fly."

I thought to myself that she was a purty hefty critter to talk about flyin', but I didn't say so.

What I wanted was to smooth the matter over and get Bob out of it the easiest way possible. I wanted him to escape the deadly guns of Snap-shot! ditto the deadly claim of the ex-widow.

If the woman's affections hadn't cut loose from Snap-shot and twined themselves like tender tendrils around my pard, it might have been easier, fur a woman kin most generally find a way where she has the will. As it was, her will was to hold what she had got.

"My pard fly!" I exclaimed, plenty indignant. "Would you have him bring down disgrace onto Cross Crick?"

"It is fly or fight, and he might be killed," she orated.

"I'll fight, kill or no kill," asseverated Bob, looking fight all over.

"Then come and let's make ready," said I. "Take care of yourself till his return, madam."

"You mean to try to induce him to give me the slip," said she, readin' me like a book, even if it was pitch dark. "Would you have him desert the own wife of his bosom?"

"Nothin' of the kind!" I objected.

"But he has a deadly foe gunnin' fur him, and he must go out and take precautions accordingly."

Jist at that minnit the voice of Snap-shot Sam was heard without, tearin' away at a truly turrible rate, invitin' my pard to come out and be eternally chawed up and all sech, and it looked as if a climax was at hand.

CHAPTER V.

THE TANGLE WORSE SNARLED.

"Pard," said I, "you are in a fix."

"Et looks so, Cy," he agreed with me.

"Any way you look at it, you are in a bad fix," I said further.

"That is about the size of it," he further agreed. "In the first place, I am married."

"And to a good woman," chipped in the ex-widdy.

"And can't get unmarried," said I.

"Not without gettin' killed and 'givin' up the ghost," said Bob.

"And that must not be!" cried the woman. "But, hear how he threatens! What will you do? Shall I hide you?"

"Hide me!"

"Yes, just that."

"Well, I reckon not. When anything on two pins calls a citizen of Cross Crick a hoss-thief, said critter has got to take it back or take what he gits. And I'm a citizen of Cross Crick!"

I was proud of my pard that minnit.

It was the sass and brag of that feller outside that had worked him up to it.

"Come out hyer, if ye dare!" Snap-shot was hollerin' at the top of his bazzoo. "Come out and take a dose of medicine, ye Cross Crick half-breed! Come out and—"

That was too much fer my pard.

To be called a hoss-thief was bad enough, but to be called a half-breed—that was too much.

With a growl, he shook off the embrace of the widdy and he was out the door like a shot—not the front door, but the one in the rear. And I guessed his game.

It was to run around and take Snap-shot unawares.

But I out and after him.

This was my chance, if ever, and I must save him from both.

I collared him at the corner, and brought him up with a jerk and a whisper.

"Bob, is it worth the risk?" I asked him.

"Didn't ye hear what he called me?" he growled.

"That don't make it so," I argued.

"But it stamps me a coward if I don't make him eat it," he argued.

"Think what a chance ye have got to escape the widdy, though," I urged upon him. "It is a golden opportunity."

"And leave her to him?"

"He can't marry her; she's yours."

"And that bein' the case, I mean to have her."

I was knocked silly by that declaration on his part.

I had no idee that he had softened toward her, but it looked so jist then.

That warm embrace must 'a' done the business fer him, I reasoned et out. But, it would never do; what would the boys at home say?

We had come to 'tend the weddin', and to find that one of us had become a victim— Why, we would never hear the end of it the longest day we lived. That was sartin.

I put et that way to Bob.

He looked at it in another light entirely, though.

"Let 'em talk!" he growled. "I consider et purty much of a trick to come over hyer and snatch away the bride elect from a man of Snap-shot Sam's caliber; don't you?"

"But you ain't got away with her, yet."

"No; but I 'pend on you to help me do the trick."

"You mean it, Bob?"

"I mean et," said he.

That settled it. I had to stand by my pard and put in my lick fer Cross Crick.

Meantime, Snap-shot Sam was chawin' the wind all to fragments, so to say, the way he was waggin' his jaw and shootin' off his mouth.

All at once there was a yell.

It was in a different voice, and at first I thought he had got hold of the ex-widdy.

The next minnit I was sot right on that, and knowed it was Parson Slimpsy that the bad man had laid hands on.

"No ye don't!" Snap-shot bellered. "Ye have done a bad job hyer, and by the crack o' doom ye have got to make it right! D'ye hear?"

"But," faltered the weaker voice—

"No but about et. The same tongue that tied the knot has got to onty it; d'ye hear?"

"But—"

"Nary a but! You repeat after me, or I'll shoot ye so full of holes that you will think ye are a porous plaster!"

"But—"

"Look hyer, do you crave to shuffle—"

"No, but—"

"I tell ye thar ain't a but in the hull hand; every card is a trump, and a good one."

Spite of it all, me and my pard had to laugh to ourselves, as we got around back of the crowd to take et in, fur the hull town was there by that time, or more.

"My good man—"

"Don't ye good man me; I'm a turrible bad one! Now you repeat—"

"I can't, I can't. Kill me if ye must, but it is impossible for me to undo what I have done. Marriage is a sacred thing—"

"You are jist right; et is! It is jist so sacred that no galoot from Cross Crick is goin' to come hyer and slip in under my guard and steal away the woman that was to have been mine. So, are ye ready?"

"My dear, respected sir—"

"Et ain't no use; you say what I say, or die!"

He clapped his gun right into the parson's ear, with that, and went on:

"I, ther parson, havin' made a slight mistake. Say that much, or I be skinned if I don't spatter yer brains all over the hull—"

It was awful, the way he threatened, and his gun pressin' home in that poor chap's ear, and there was nothin' the parson could do but comply with his request.

He repeated the words.

"Do call that marriage off," went on Snap-shop Sam.

He said that, too.

"And do say and declare that a mistake is made, and that Susan McKorkle is Susan McKorkle still."

The poor parson said all that, too, with much groaning, but he was denyin' it in his heart at the same time, as we all knowed well enough.

"And that there was no marriage," he follered Sam's lead. "And that it is all null, and void, and blank. And that Susan McKorkle is free to marry anybody she wants to marry, amen!"

"Thar!" cried Snap-shot, when the last word had been said. "Now, I want to see that galoot what says he has got a claim on ther widdy. I jist want to see him one second, and see what he has to say fer himself. Susan, come out hyer and git married!"

That crowd was enjoyin' it rich.

But Snap-shot Sam was a citizen thar and my pard wasn't, and most of the sympathy was on his side.

I nudged my pard and suggested that we had better light out while we had the chance, but he stuck to his former decision. If he had a wife, and it looked as if he had, he meant to keep her.

"Nary a come!" hollered Susan, from the darkened room whur we had left her at. "I am married hard and fast, in spite of all you make that poor feller say to the contrary. You wasn't on hand, and it ain't my fault that it happened, and I can't help myself out of it."

"But, hang et, you are out of et!"

"Oh, no; that don't go! I am married, and it can't be untied."

I felt perspiration on my forehead fer my pard, fer to make the very best of it he was still in a fix, like a fly in molasses.

But, hang it, what was it, my funeral? He wanted it so, and if he was satisfied, what reason had I to kick? None at all, I decided, and I made up my mind to see him through, if possible, fur the glory of Cross Crick—lookin' at it from my pard's standpoint, and Cross Crick's honor.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH MY PARD CHIPS IN.

Snap-shot Sam was b'ilin' mad.

He had his guns in hand, and thar was blood in his eye.

A halt had been called to the celebration that had been goin' on at his expense.

He had vowed that he would pickle the first man that made another yaup or fired another cracker till the thing had been settled.

Sam was a big rooster on his own dunghill, so to say, and had the majority of the crowd with him, and me and my pard would fare slim if they got holt of us, we knowed.

You bet Bob was jist as brash as could be, though; he felt prime good, after that big supper we had had a little earlier along.

He allowed that he wouldn't be afeerd to stand up to Snap-shot in a fair fight, if it could be arranged, but, of course, he didn't hanker fer one of his snap-shots.

That was what he was likely to git, if he showed his nose.

Yet thar we wur, in open sight.

"Whur is that galoot at?" bellered Snap-shot. "Tell him that I want ter see him bad. I have got somethin' fer him. I will put a hole in him and plug it at one and ther same time. Whur is the hoss-thief?"

"Hyer he is!" hollered Bob, before I could stop him. "Hyer he is, you cross-grained son of a jumped jackpot! If you are dyin' to see me, come right out hyer whur I'm at and see if I don't give ye a dose of Cross Crick pills before you kin order yer coffin!"

"Thar ye be, hye?" yowled Snap-shot, and he kem in our direction with a rush and a roar. "Thar is one way to ondo the knot, if that fool woman is bound to consider et tied fer keep, spite of the fact that the same man that tied it has already ondone et; and that is to make a widdy of her the same as she was afore! I only ask one snap at ye, that's all!"

"Bob," said I, "you're dead."

I felt sure he wa sas good as dead.

Thar was a lump in my throat, fer I had a feelin' fer Bob as a pard.

"Don't you go into mournin' till you see it fer a fact," advised Bob. "You stand by me, that's all."

"We are both dead," I sighed. "He is lightnin' with his guns, and we won't stand no earthly show at all. See how the crowd is scatterin' now!"

And so they were.

Bob's voice had located us to 'em, and they was makin' lots of room fer Sam.

But, all of a suddent, Sammy fetched up against somethin' that he didn't look fer, and that somethin' was Susan McKorkie—or Horner.

"Call me a fool woman, do ye?" she screeched, fetchin' him a thump on his think-pot with a heavy bristle brush of her own makin'. "A fool woman! I was about to make one of myself, marryin' you, that's so!"

She had got in three whacks, while speakin', and the last one floored Sammy; down he went, all in a heap.

I looked at Bob.

"Bob," said I, some sollum.

"Wull?" said he.

"D'ye see that?"

"Shur!" said he, smilin'.

"Do you want to take a wildcat like that home to Cross Crick?" I asked him.

"She would be a hull team on the side she was fightin' for," said he. "I reckon I'll stick to the bargain, Cy."

"I think she would," I sighed.

"Time!" some feller hollered.

Susan was goin' to wade in and finish Snap-shot right off, I took it.

"It is time somebody took the blow out of him," she declared, hotly. "To call me old, and then a fool—Wough, you wretch! I've a notion to swob yer throat with this hyer!"

She flourished the brush plenty threatenin'.

Sam rolled over and got up and started off on a new tack, with a new beller.

If he could git sight of my pard, I knowed he would pepper him fer all and make up fer what the widdy had done to him—I mean Mrs. Horner.

Jist then the parson kem our way.

He was runnin' around like a hen with her head off, tryin' to find a soft place to die on, et looked.

He thought Snap-shot was after him, I opine, and he made a dash fer us, his arms out towards us and his coat tails out from us, and as he kem he screeched plenty—

"Save me! Save me!"

He was nigh about ram-doozled, was that parson.

The wonder is that he wasn't a plum howlin' idiot before the thing kem to a wind-up.

My pard put out his arms to meet ther parson half way, as it wur, and as he done et he made the passin' remark that he thought et was a parson's business to be saved.

And to which I added a clause about savin' others.

"Of course, I'll save ye," ejaculated Bob. "Come right to me arms, me little man, and nothin' shill harm ye!"

The parson kem; he plumped plum into Bob's embrace, and Bob picked him up and proceeded to make a chest protector of him fer his own safety, as he turned to face Snap-shot, for Snap-shot had jist sighted him again.

"Thar ye be, hye?" he blatted cut. "Look out fer yer skin this time—"

"Don't ye shoot this way!" hollered Bob. "Thar is only this one parson any-

wheres around, and if ye kill him yer jig is up, anyhow."

"Put me down! Put me down!"

So squealed the parson, skart to death twice over.

And the way he wiggled and squirmed was a caution to kill, bless me if it wasn't.

"Hold still!" ordered Bob, givin' him a squeeze that was akin to a b'ar. "If ye don't, I be hanged if I don't give ye a shock of 'tricity that will render ye spineless!"

"But, I'll be killed!"

"Jist what ye had orter be, ding bang ye!"

"Put him down!" yauped Snap-shot. "Ef ye don't, I'll drive right through ye both!"

"Drive ahead!" whooped Bob. "Ef ye do, thar will be no more marryin' hyer this evenin', I guess. You are on the wrong trail, anyhow, old cactus bur!"

"A cactus bur!"

Snap-shot let out a bawl that must have been heard a mile, and made a grand charge on the enemy's breastworks—that is to say, the parson, he happenin' to be playin' that role.

But, bless ye, he hadn't got thar before the other enemy attacked him in the rear, and that bresh played a lively part in the engagement fer about two seconds, in the strong grasp of Susan the slatherer—so to call her for oncet, for she was jist that.

Sam couldn't attack the front and defend the rear at both one and the same time, so he right-about-faced.

And the minnit he done that, what?

Why, my pard jist charged double-quick right up to the rear breastworks of him.

"What d'ye mean by et?" bellered Sam, grabbin' that bresh away from the woman and grabbin' holt of her wrist. "What d'ye mean?"

"I mean to let a lowlived coward like you know jist what I think of him, that's what!" retorted the woman. "Let go of me, or by cats if I don't scoop yer eyes out!"

"I'll tame ye, soon's I make ye my wife," vocalised Sam. "Whar's that parson at?"

"He's right hyer!" answered my pard, pokin' forward a gun at close range. "You drap that lady, the which same is my wife, or I'll be under the painful necessity of droppin' you!"

And it looked fer jist one second as if my pard had the best hand in the game.

But the man he had brushed up against was Snap-shot Sam, a terror by name and a terror by nature as well, and when you tackle a feller of that calibre you can't most allus sometimes tell jist which way the cat is goin' to jump.

CHAPTER VII.

BOBBERT GITS SPOTTED.

It was lively, I tell ye!

Jist pause fer a minnit to 'preciate ther situation.

Thar wur me and my pard, feelin' purty good; two of a kind in a hull camp of furriners.

What didn't belong to Cross Crick, was furrin to et, and that's what I mean hyer; we wur pilgrims in a strange land, so to put et.

We had come over thar to attend a widdy's weddin', but hang me if one of us hadn't been looped in to marry the widdy by mistake, and things wur tied up in bad shape.

Thar was the dissap'inted lover, the

which same was Snap-shot Sam, with one hand holdin' fast to his lost prize, and she a-kickin' wuss'n a Government mule; and thar was my pard, huggin' the parson to his manly bosom for protection and pokin' a gun at t'other feller.

Not only that, but I was thar some'rs, and thar was the hull camp of Wagon-pole out to see et, every man jack of 'em whoopin' et up fer one side or the other, but mostly fer Snap.

Me and my pard was looked on as interlopers.

Somehow, quicker'n a wink, Snap-shot's arm kem up, gittin' in under my pard's guard, and a pistol was poked right in Bob's ear.

I expected to see the hull top of his head go off, but et didn't, although I don't know why. Mebby Sam wanted the fun of lettin' him know what was goin' to foller.

I jumped to the rescue, but a dozen hands fell onto me and yanked me back ker-flap, and I was told to stand stiddy or I would git what I didn't hanker after; so I stood stiddy and looked mournful on, wonderin' what my pard's fate would be.

"Hold this woman!" Sam was a-hollerin'.

The female was a-makin' et lively fer him, but half a dozen of Sam's friends laid holt on her.

They held her arms, but they couldn't hold her tongue, and I reckon no woman ever shot off as many words in the same space of while as she did on that occasion.

It was a stiddy fire, one streak.

"Shut up!" ordered Sam, fetchin' her a swipe with the back of his hand across the bazoo. "I am goin' to be master of this business, by mighty!"

Et looked as if he was.

His friends wur numerous, and they had the bulge on us the worst manner.

Sam had sealed his fate with that woman, though; any one could see that with half an eye, even if it hadn't been sealed before, which it had.

She was his bitter foe from that minnit, and all she wanted was a chance to tickle him with the business end of a bowie; that was plain as day. Thar was no hope fer him.

And my pard, he chipped in, more by dumb luck than by sense, and made her his devoted adorer from that instant of time. She was no gazelle, but she was a woman of the female sex, and she had a woman's feelin's somewhere in her make-up, same as they all have.

"No one but a brute would strike a woman!" roared out my pard. "All I want is a fair show at you, Snap-shot Sam!"

"And that's what we ain't havin, hyer!" I chipped in.

They couldn't do more'n kill us, and it looked as if we wur as good as dead anyhow, so what was the difference?

"Of course, you ain't!" screeched the widdy—that was. "Let me get at him once, and see if I don't tear his eyes out! Oh, how I might 'a' been deceived in that brute!"

"Do ye want another?" demanded Sam, drawin' back.

"No more o' that!" warned a dozen voices in the crowd, and Sam didn't hit her ag'in.

He turned to the parson, who was hangin' limber in my pard's embrace, by this time, havin' tired of strugglin', fer he was like a baby in Bob's big right arm.

"Parson, marry us!"

That was his order, hot shot.

"I—I—I can't, sir!" was the falter.

"You will or you'll die!" roared Sam, bringin' his other gun to bear on the parson, printin' right 'tween his eyes.

Sam's friends wur holdin' the bride elect.

"Yes, yes, I'll do it!" acquiesced the parson, full of fear. "Don't shoot, and I'll do anything."

"Git to work at et, then," ordered Sammy.

He kept the gun right thar, and that parson had to 'bey.

"Will you have this woman to be your lawful wedded wife, to hold and keep forever?" he asked of Snap-shot, or words to that effect.

"I will!" shouted Sam, like a fish-horn.

"And will you, Susan, have this man to be your lawful wedded—"

"No, I won't!" screeched Susan. "Thank heavens, I am a married woman this minnit and you can't undo that, no matter what you do!"

That was a fact the parson couldn't get around, sure enough, and he didn't want to; but with that gun lookin' at him right 'tween the eyes, what could he do?

But Susan's answer seemed to upset things.

"Go on!" commanded Sam, like a constable on a raid.

"But—but she won't," Slimpsky urged.

"I don't keer whether she will or not; go on!"

"But, sir, my dear—my good sir, if the lady won't—"

"See hyer, I am doin' this thing!" cried Sam. "I say go on!"

"Will you, Susan, have—"

"No, I tell ye, I won't!" she shrieked.

"You have married me oncet to-night, and now you want to marry me over to another man, and have me a bigamist! What do you take me fer, anyhow? Men of Wagonpole, are ye all lost to honor, that ye will stand by—"

"Shut up!" bellered Sam. "Do ye want another?" And he drawed his hand back again.

"None of that!" was given at him, and this time by more voices than before.

And on the outside of the crowd I heard a murmur of sympathy fur the lady.

"Parson, go on!"

"But, sir, I—"

"Are you pinin' to be a angel?" roared out Snap-shot. "I am doin' this thing, I tell ye. If she won't answer, jist go ahead and marry me to her; that is all I want, anyhow."

That parson was willin' to do anything.

He was skart till he was ready to die of fright, fer Snap-shot's eyes wur turrible, no mistake.

All that pore critter wanted was to git loose and git out of that camp, and I was willin' to bet thar would be a vacant pulpit fer somebody to fill.

Et kem out jist as I prophesied.

But, I'm ahead.

"And you will love her, and cherish her, and take care of her in sickness and health?" he managed to chatter out.

"Bet yer life I will take keer of her!" promised Sam. "Go on!"

"And forsakin' all others, you will cleave only to her, so long as ye both do live?"

"That will be accordin' to how she behaves herself," demurred Sam. "That is my business anyhow. Is that all there is to et, you white-livered tenderfoot?"

"Y—ye—yes, that's all."

"Then say I'm her husband, and amen to it!"

But the parson wasn't in condition to

say the words, fur he had gone and fainted again.

Sam, in his eager, had touched him with the tip of his gun on the forehead, and at the touch the parson keeled, clear gone.

By this time both me and Bob wur gittin' wrothy, so to say, and if I had been free we would taken the chances of a snap and sailed in. Bob was spotted behind the ears.

With a sudden turn, he flung the fainted parson plum onto the bosom of Snap-shot, and follered it up as quick as scat and got a grip onto both of his hands so that he couldn't shoot, and I quaked with alarm, wonderin' if he was equal to the emergency.

"You measly brindled dorg!" my pard yelled. "You have been havin' your way too long! Men of Wagonpole, all I want is a fair show. Am I goin' to have et?"

CHAPTER VIII.

SUSAN GOES AND VANISHES.

The tide had been turnin'.

It had begun to turn from the minnit that Snap-shot struck the woman.

He hadn't hit her hard enough to do her any material damage, that's true, but it had hurt her finer feelin's a good deal wuss.

She, by the way, had never ceased to talk fer a second, but had kept up a stiddy fire all along the line, so to say, and if I undertook to repeat et all I wouldn't have room fer anything else.

"That is it!" hollered some on the outside of the crowd. "Give 'em a fair show!"

"Yes, yes, a fair fight fer a bride!" said others.

"That's ther ticket, boys!"

"Whoop-ee!"

I thought I might chip in right thar.

What I was after was to save my pard from both complications.

I didn't want to see him done up by Snap-shot Sam, who was showin' his true colors fer a tough.

Neither did I want to see him saddled fer life with the derelect of the late Budd McKorkle, if there was any honorable way out of it.

"That is the idea," I supported the ticket. "Let me loose, fellers, and let's get at this thing in right shape. Let it be a duel fer a bride, and the best man takes her."

"Hooray!" whooped the crowd.

"No you don't!" chipped in the woman. "I am married to this man, and I will stick to him for life, the same as I promised to do. He has shown himself a gentleman, and I love him!"

You'd orter heard the cheer that went up at that.

"Ye love him, do ye?" hollered Sammy.

He was strugglin' mightily to git away from Bob, but Bob held on like grim death.

"Yes, I love him!"

"How is that, Cy?" asked my pard, turnin' one eye on me. "I'll shed my skin fer her, if need be!"

And then the crowd whooped all the harder, and I knowed that it was a clean gone case fer Bob, and that there was no use my tryin' to save him further.

I went right back to my decision made before, that I would see him through with et or bust, fer the glory of Cross Crick—lookin' at it from his standpoint, no more foolin'.

"That is more'n any woman ever said about me," I answered him. "She is

yours, Bob, and we'll take her home with us or die with our boots on."

And again they whooped et, wuss'n ever.

The tide had plum turned.

I was now free, and I proceeded straight to 't the guns out of Snap-shot's fists.

He was kickin' and swearin' at a terrible rate, and I felt glad fer that parson's feelin's that he hadn't quite come to yet.

The widdy—I still call her so, from havin' started off that way, she was free, too, and she was lookin' around fer that broom with which she had already done good execution.

She found it.

"Now, then," she demanded, "let me settle the business with this big brute! Just let me give him what he deserves! Thank heavens, a kind Providence interfered and saved me from the fate of bein' coupled to him for life. Let me get at him!"

"No, no, you stay back," said Bob. "It is me and him fer et, and I guess I am good fer a round or two, anyhow."

With that he let Snappy go.

Whew! but he was mad.

He made a rush fer my pard, like a bull at a rag, and I expected to see Bob go down, but he didn't.

Bob used to know quite a bit about handlin' his paddies, and when he is dead sober, the same as he was now, he could do credit to himself and sometimes damage to the other feller.

He ducked and delivered.

Sammy got et in the neck as purty as you ever see.

Et staggered him, and the crowd applauded, and the widdy—that was—clapped her hands.

"Beautiful!" said she.

"A fair show fer et!" I hollered out. "Give 'em room, pardners!"

I was bettin' on my pard, then, after that first clip, and I wanted to see him do the other feller up brown.

"Yes, give 'em a fair chance!" hollered the crowd. "Let the best man win! This is the biggest thing Wagonpole has ever seen, anyhow; don't spoil it now!"

And I opine it was, too.

"Give me a gun!" hollered Snap-shot.

"No ye don't," I 'posed him.

"Let et be a fair fire, at fifty yards," he urged.

"And let you pick off my pard like a crow off'm a pole, hey?"

"He will have a fair show."

"And you a noted hair shot! Oh, no, et won't work, Sammy; that would be suicide."

"Right hyer are all the weepins I want," said my pard, branishin' his fists. "Let him come, and see if I don't give him all the medicine he kin take in one dose—"

Sammy was comin'.

There was a collision that fairly made the fur fly, to express it in a figgery way.

I hearty wished our sportin' editor might 'a' been present, but after awhile I was jist as hearty glad that he warn't.

As I said a spell ago—or meant to: You can't always tell by the color of a cat jist how fur it kin jump. And the cat here didn't jump the way I thought et was goin' to.

There was a collision, as I said, and the two rivals fur the hand of the derelict of the late Budd McKorkle grappled in a deadly ambrace and guv all their strength to the business of the occasion, diggin' in their heels and puttin' on all pressure.

My pard got first fall.

He landed, Snap-shot on his back purty as you ever see.

But Snappy didn't stay thar; he was up again and at it, and in a few minnits Bob took a drop.

Down he went, all in a heap, with a dull thud—as we used to read in the old-time Injun story, and to my horror he laid plum still.

Et sorter surprised Snap-shot Sam, too, fer he was all ready fer him to pop up again, same as he had done himself, but Bobbert didn't pop worth a penny that time.

Snap-shot looked jubilant.

He flopped his arms and crowed like a rooster, long and loud.

"Hooray fer Snap-shot!" yelled his friends. "That was the way to do it, Sammy boy!"

"We'll see who will marry that woman, I reckon," said Sam. "Let me have my guns, now, whoever has got 'em, and bring on the gal and the parson. I am on top yet!"

I had rushed in by that time to lift my pard.

Right where his head had struck was a stone that had done the business fer him.

He was as insensible as the parson had been a little while before, and I half feared that he was done up fer keeps.

A couple of chaps came to my aid, with somethin' to wet up his whistle with, and after a few minutes Bob opened his peepers and looked at us in a dull way.

"Whur am I at?" he inquired.

"You are all right, pardner," I answered him.

"Did I do him up?" he next asked, rememberin' what had taken place.

"Wull, hardly," said I. "You are about in that condition yerself, jist at present, Bobbert."

He looked sad on hearin' that, but he sorter pulled himself together purty soon and I helped him up and walked him around a little, and he asked where Susan was at.

And that, by the way, it soon came to our ears, was jist what Snap-shot Sam wanted to find out. Et looked as if Susan had gone and disappeared.

And so she had, fer a fact.

CHAPTER IX.

INSULT OFFERED CROSS CRICK.

A crowd is a crazy critter, usually. You can't bet which side it is goin' to be on any two minnits in the day.

Seein' that Snap-shot Sam had dumped my pard, owin' to accident that he hadn't nothin' to do with, that crowd whooped et up fer Sammy, as if he had done a big thing.

Me and Bob wur out in the cold again, et seemed.

"Bob," said I.

"Wull, what?" said he.

"Have you had enough?" I asked him.

"No, by gosh! I ain't," he answered me spirited.

"What more d'ye want?" I inquired.

"Satisfaction," he growled.

"Ye may git et," said I.

"I mean to," said he.

"But," I pleaded, "this is yer golden opportunity."

"Et will be goldener, by'n by," said he. "I am goin' gunnin' fer his scalp, now."

A lot of fellers standin' around heard what we had to say, and they shook their heads and hunched their shoulders, as if to warn us to go slow.

Ye see, I couldn't, spite of my good resolution so ter do, bring myself to like

the idee of his takin' a bride home with him to Cross Crick. What I wanted was to induce him away.

But he wouldn't induce worth a cent.

I couldn't go back on what I had promised, so I took holt with a new resolve to see him through.

But where was Susan?

That was the question, jist then.

Snap-shot was bawlin' fer her, plenty tremenjus.

He might 'a' knowed she wouldn't answer his call, even if she heard him.

There was a stay of proceedin's, fur while they might possibly have got along without a parson, they sartainly couldn't get along without a bride.

"Cy," sighed my pard, "whur kin she be at?"

"I take et she has scooted fer Cross Crick," I answered him.

"Do ye think so?"

"Mebby as not."

"I don't believe et."

"No?"

"Not a bit."

"Why?"

"She wouldn't go without me."

"Well, there is somethin' in that, mebbly. Anyhow, she is missin'."

"D'ye think they have kidnapped her?" he asked anxious.

"Mebby they have done that, pard."

"Mebby they have, but Snap-shot don't know et yet," said I.

Snappy was still bawlin' fur her.

All at oncet Snappy sighted the parson. Slimpsky was on his hoss, and was tryin' to steal out of the camp.

The streets wur too light fer him to go unobserved, though, and at sight Snap-shot called on him to stop.

Not havin' the nerve to make a break, Slimpsky obeyed.

"You will keep on till thar will be a hangin' hyer," shouted Sammy, "and thar will be a parson at the business end of the rope! You aire wanted hyer, and hyer you have got to stay!"

"But, sir, I can be of no further use—"

"Et remains to be seen whether you kin or not. You will stay hyer, or you will git hurt."

"But, my business—"

"Your business is right hyer; see?"

The parson slid out of the saddle, and Sam ordered some of his pards to take charge of him and see that he didn't git away.

Then they guv their attention again to the findin' of Susan.

Of a sudden thar kem a shot.

Snap-shot was seen to dodge, and I thought plum sure he had got a dose of lead.

His face was lead pale, anyhow, and it must 'a' been a close call fer his punkin. He jumped into the crowd, so as to escape another.

"I know who done that!" he bellered.

"Who was et?" hollered his friends.

"Et was that cuss from Cross Crick!"

I knowed et wasn't Bob at all, though the shot had come from our direction.

"That is a lie!" I hollered out. "We have been standin' right hyer, and anybody around hyer will testify to et."

"But, I seen him do et!" cried Sam.

That was serious.

"You lie!" hollered my pard.

"Boys, are you goin' to allow a citizen of Wagonpole be murdered by a galoot from Cross Crick?" demanded Snap-shot.

There was a howl immediate.

"Not by a tub full!" they hollered.

"String him up, and stop that kind of business!"

"But, I tell ye he didn't," I urged the truth upon 'em.

"And I say I didn't," declared Bob, lookin' slightly pale.

"And I say he did!" hollered Sam. "Seize him, and lodge him in the cooler, anyhow. We don't want no murderers wanderin' around hyer pickin' off a man when he ain't lookin'."

Bob didn't stand no show at all.

Bein' strangers in the camp, that was almost enough to hang us both, anyhow.

More'n that, we had let out that we had come in the interest of the Howler, and as the Howler had howled lately about the Wagonpole country, they had no real love for us.

They made a dash, and Bob pulled his gun.

I jumped at him and clinched with him to hold him from shootin' anybody.

If he done that, it would be all day with us. They would string us up to a tree in the shortest kind of order.

"Easy, Bob," I spoke to him.

"Easy nothin'!" cried Bob. "They lie!"

"I know they do, but we are only two against the hull camp."

"I don't care if we are only two against two camps! Let me go, Cy, and see me shoot his head off!"

But I didn't let go, jist the same.

In another minnit a dozen fellers seized us both, and Bob's pistol was jerked away from him.

"Hyer is the proof!" hollered the feller what had too et. "One of the chambers is empty!"

Bob turned white on hearin' that.

Mebby I did the same, and I was thankful nobody had been killed by the shot that had been fired.

Bob hadn't done et, that was sure, but that made no difference to the crowd, so long as Snap-shot Sam said he did, and here was the proof dead against him.

Snap-shot kem up and took the gun.

He smiled wicked.

"Maybe you will say now you didn't do it," he sneered.

"I do say I didn't do it," declared Bob, "but that ain't sayin' I wouldn't like to."

"Lucky it didnt hit me," said Sam, "or you would dangle from a limb in short order. You may have a close call for et as it is."

"All the same, I didn't fire that shot—"

"And I know he didn't," said I.

"What is the use?" demanded Snap-shot. "Where is Mayor McReilly? We will lock both up to keep the peace."

"Right here I am," said the person named, a big-feller with bushy whiskers.

"The proof is plain, boys, and I order 'em locked up till mornin'. Off with 'em!"

And off they went with us, havin' deprived us of our weepins, and in about two mighty minnits they had bundled us into the cooler and shut and locked the door on us. And leavin' us there, with many a cruel taunt, they set off to look up Susan.

CHAPTER X.

SHOWS THE VALUE OF A MATCH.

They had left us a lantern.

It was a feeble, smoky thing, but it shed some light.

I looked at Bob and he looked at me, and we each beheld a sorry-lookin' man.

"Well, Bob," said I, "we are dead in it, now."

"I have had a heap more fun, many a time," said Bob, sollum.

"And you are likely to lose yer bride," I reminded him. I was secret glad.

"I reckon Susan will have somethin'

to say about that," said Bob, in all confidence. "She is a hull team, is Susan."

"But, what kin she do?" I put et to him. "This hyer camp is gettin' crazy, and half the citizens are two-thirds peculiar with jig-water. They will be bound to see the weddin' come off 'cordin' to programme."

"I leave et all to Susan," said Bob, easy enough. "She will take keer of herself."

"But, they will force et," said I.

"Will they?"

"They shur will. They have got the parson, and they will git Susan and make a match of et whether she will or not."

"They have still got Susan to deal with," said Bob. "You leave et to her. When a woman makes up her mind to a thing, you kin gamble that it is goin' to go."

"But, she ain't legal married to you," I reasoned with him.

"The mischief she ain't!"

"Not a bit."

"Why not?"

"Because neither one of ye intended it so at the time. It was only that fool parson's blunder."

"But, he said it goes, and it must. But that don't matter; if it is not strong enough we'll make et stronger when we git home to Cross Crick."

I knowed it wasn't no use, and I groaned in spirit fer my pard.

"Well, leavin' that alone, how are we goin' to git out of here?" I asked him.

"I'm a sandbur if I know," he answered.

"You see the game?"

"Shur."

"They will keep us hyer till mornin', and then they will pack us off fer Cross Crick."

"And by that time they will mebbby have found Susan, and forced things, as you say, and I will be out a bride!"

He was on his feet pacin' the floor.

"That is it," I agreed.

"It musn't be!"

"What is goin' to be done about it?"

"We have got to git out of here!"

"How?"

"Somehow—anyhow!"

"Easier said than done, pard."

"It has got to be done! Cy, am I goin' to lose a wife, now that I have got one? I will onbosom myself to you, pard. A wife is a luxury that I have always longed fur and often wished I had, but I hadn't the courage to hunt one up on my own account. Somehow I weakened and scared off, every time a chance presented itself. Now here chance has taken holt of the business and made it dead easy for me, and am I goin' to lose what I have won? Not by a big heap!"

"Then ye love her, Bob?"

"That ain't got nothin' to do with it; she loves me, and that is all I keer fur."

I knowed dead that he had been smitten, too, but didn't want to own up to et, and now that he put et the way he did he enlisted all my sympathies on his side.

But how to get out?

That was the poser.

And while we wur still posin' on et, we heard a great shout in the direction of the camp centre.

"What's that?" asked Bob.

"They have found Susan, I reckon," I ventured.

"You think so?"

"It sounds like et."

"Mebby et was her that fired at Sam."

"That is what I thought at first," I agreed with him.

"Then little good it will do to find her, she will fire on him again."

"No she won't. If Sam knows it was her, he will give her a choice of two things."

"What's them?"

"She will have to marry him, or he will let us go and put her where we are at."

"I don't believe et."

"No?"

"No."

"Why don't ye?"

"Because, he has got Susan to deal with."

"You seem to set a store of confidence by Susan, pard, no mistake."

"Yes, you are right I do, and you'll see that I won't get left, either, in doin' et."

"But jist hear 'em yell! What on earth has broke loose?"

"And shootin', too."

"Wish this jail had a winder in et, so's we might take a peek out at 'em."

Jist then kem a knock at the door.

"Who is there?" I hollered.

"I have got a note fur ye," said a voice.

"From Susan!" cried Bob.

"Mebby enough," I agreed.

"See if ye kin shove et in under the door," said Bob, excited like.

I hurried and grabbed up the lantern and carried it there, but in my flurry the light went out.

We both said things that wasn't per-lite, at that.

"Light et quick," said Bob.

"Have you got a match?" I asked him.

"No, not one. Ain't you?"

"Don't believe I have."

We went through our clothes lively.

Not a match was to be found, though, and we groaned and said bad words.

"What is the matter?" asked the voice.

"Our light is out."

"Well, feel fer the paper; it is under the door."

We felt, and purty soon Bob declared that he had it, and then he called fer a match.

The feller outside had some, but the door fitted too close to allow 'em to be pushed under as the paper had been, and we wur in a fix.

"Say, do you know what is in this note?" I asked him.

"No, nary word," he answered.

"Who is et from?" demanded Bob.

"Susan McKorkle."

Bob groaned.

I sighed.

No matter what was in that note, no matter how important it might be, we couldn't read a word of it.

"What is goin' on? What is all the yellin' about?"

So I inquired.

"Why, ther widdy has changed her mind, after thinkin' et all over, and has agreed to marry Snap-shot Sam after all."

My pard fairly howled, on hearin' that, and I imagine that he tore his hair, but bein' in the dark I couldn't swear to that. It cut him all up, and he took on like mad.

I wanted to ask somethin' more, but jist then the feller made a hiss as a warnin' to keep still, and we heard him scurry away. And before we had time to say anything to each other we heard other voices and steps runnin' from another direction. Verily, the night was full of fatal incidents fur us; aye, verily et was!

CHAPTER XI.

SNAP-SHOT'S STRONG HAND.

"Hello, in thar!"

Et was a newcomer that hailed.

"Hello to yerselves!" I hollered back at 'em. "What is et?"

"How are ye comin' on?"

"We are stoppin' hyer fur the present," said Bob. "Aire you the fellers that's got the key?"

"Nary. The mayor has the key."

"Then what d'ye want?"

"We have come to tell ye the news, seein' that we aire pards of Snap-shot Sam."

"Never mind the news," said I. "What we want is a light. Our lantern has gone out. Can't ye get a match to us?"

"Never mind a light; you will sleep all the better without one. Do ye know that the widdy has made up her mind to marry Snap-shot after all? She has, fer a fact."

"We don't care a tinker's dash fur the widdy," said I. "What we are in need of is a light. We ain't done no crime, and it is wrong to keep us deprived of light. How d'ye s'pose we kin finish a game of seven-up without light? Fetch the mayor here."

"He will be hyer when the weddin' party arrives."

"The weddin' party?"

"Yes."

"What are they comin' here for?"

"Snap-shot wants ye to see him married."

"To the mischief with him!" said I. "Get us a light, won't ye?"

"You will have all the light ye want, pretty presently, when they git hyer."

And then they went off, laffin' together like the brace of jackasses-they wur, and me and Bob was in a maze of mystery.

What did it all mean, anyhow?

It was awful.

"Cy," said Bob, "what is goin' to be did?"

"Bob," says I, "I be hanged for a cutthroat if I know. Et is all a riddle."

"Kin et be that she means to marry him?"

"You heard what was said."

"But, she can't mean et."

"Why not?"

"She said she—she loved me; an—and besides that he slapped her in the mouth oncet."

"Wimmin is past all findin' out, Bobbert," I said to him. "Mebby she has soured on you, fer some reason, and gone back to her first love."

"But, she is married to me!"

"Mebby she believes she ain't, now that she has made up with him. As I told ye, it was all a mistake, anyhow. You two hadn't no intention of doin' anything of that kind."

"But, the parson done et, and he said et held good."

"I know he said so."

"And that made et so."

"Mebby it did."

"I know et did. What is a parson good fer, ef et don't go when he says et goes?"

"Well, pardner, thar ain't no use our argifyin' the p'int," said I. "The secret of the hull business is in that note you have got in your hand."

And then we bewailed the goneness of our light.

All this while the town was goin' wild, off in the direction of the centre, where the stores, saloons, hotels, and so forth wur at; and by 'm by we heard moosic.

And sich moosic et was! Et was a com-

bination of tin pans, whistles, bells, dinner pots, mingled with the few real instruments that could be skart up in the camp; and by the direction of et we knowed it was comin' toward the jail, and we waited.

Needless to say that; we couldn't do anything else but wait, seein' the fix we wur in.

Et kem nearer, and we heard 'em shoutin' and singin'.

And then arrived.

The door was opened.

Thar they wur, the hull b'ilin' of 'em.

They had lights a-plenty, and it 'mind-ed me of a former 'casion in which I had figgered.

I was in a jail similar, and the citizens of the camp kem down on me in about that same fashion to do the lynch act, and at the recollection I felt a chill go over me.

"Hyar we be!" sung out Snap-shot Sam.

"Well, what d'ye want, if ye be thar?" I demanded, crusty as could be.

"Didn't ye git the word I sent ye?"

"What word?"

"That the weddin' was comin' off, 'cordin' to programme."

"We don't keer nothin' about the weddin'," I yauped. "What we want is a light. We have been in the dark fer an hour!"

"Ye see, I wanted to let the woman know that we hadn't been able to read her note, and that was the way I took of givin' her the tip. We didn't know what the game was."

"No light!" cried the woman.

"Nary a bit," declared Bob.

"That is rough," said she. "At least give 'em a light," she said to the mayor, who was near her.

"They had one all right."

"Yes, but it went out," said I prompt.

"Bother a light!" cried Snap-shot.

"Let 'em be glad they are alive. Line up hyer fur the weddin'."

"They kin see all the better without a light in there," said the mayor. "We want them to be able to report it in full in the Howler. Ha! ha! Our correspondent on the spot!"

"And he'll state where he was, too," laughed Snap.

Bob had give me a nudge, and was tryin' to read the note by the light that kem in at the door.

"Do ye make et out?" I whispered.

"No; see if you kin," said he.

"Give et here."

I took et and stepped back, while he took my place at the door.

"Hello! Thar ye be?" cried Snap-shot. "You will see this lady made the happy wife of yours truly."

"I don't see how you are goin' to marry a woman that is already wed," said Bob.

But, the parson onwed her, you know."

"He couldn't."

"He done et jist ther same."

"But he didn't ontie me, and I am her husband up to date," my pard declared.

"Then she will have two husbands mighty soon," declared Snap-shot. "Bring up the parson," he called.

The parson was led to the front.

And all that time I was tryin' to make out what that note said, and I believed I had about mastered it.

"Let the weddin' go on," I hollered out. "All that me and my pard wants is leave to strike a bee line fur Cross Crick. Let us out, and we'll dust."

I guv Bob a nudge.

He didn't know what it meant, but he kept still.

"Then you can see it all without a light?" asked the woman, as she leaned on Sam's arm.

"Every bit of et, ma'm," I answered.

"Of course they kin see," chipped in Snap-shot. "They kin see better without a light 'n what they could with one. Come, parson, open your book in the right place and start her off."

Sam looked around to see the parson and whur he was at.

As he done so, the woman guv me a sly signal, and I guv one back to her that it was all right.

Bob hadn't made no mistake in his estimate of that woman, it 'peared. Susan had a plan in her noddle that was goin' to put a spoke in Snap-shot's wheel, if nothin' busted. The parson lined up, havin' got a little over his scare, and opened his book.

CHAPTER XII.

SUSAN'S SCHEME.

It was gettin' interestin'.

I wondered whose wife Susan would really be when they got done with her.

She had been married to my pard, hard and fast the parson declared, and now he was about to marry her to another man, after a sort of mock divorce.

But then it was a question in my mind whether that first marriage would stand good in law, under the circumstances, and if she was now married to the other feller, wouldn't my pard be out of it?

I thought so, but that remained to be seen.

Havin' opened his book, the parson cleared his throat. And havin' cleared his throat, he said:

"It is understood that what I am doing now I am doing because I am forced to do it, and not because I want to do it—"

"That's all right, parson," chipped in Sam. "You are doin' it because you can't help yerself; that is understood, so now fire ahead and make a job of it."

"In doing what I am about to do, I throw the responsibility where it belongs—upon those who force me into doing it. It is possible that the law will hold a mistake—"

"See hyer, parson, you will find a mistake right hyer," cried Snap, drawin' a popper, "if you don't git down to business to oncet."

He cocked the gun and leveled it.

The parson kem to time.

He read off the questions, straight and prompt.

Snap-shot responded, full and strong, and the widdy chimed in on her side.

My pard looked on in a kind of a bafozled fashion, as if he was losin' a pearl of great price and couldn't help himself a bit.

Purty soon the parson reached the vital p'int.

He wanted to know if anybody objected.

That was You-bet's chance.

"You kin bet yer life somebody objects!" he hollered out. "That same woman was wed to me awhile ago, and I don't mean to have my claim jumped without a protest."

Snap-shot laughed.

"Yer protest don't go," he answered. "Susan has changed her mind and come to her sense, and she is goin' to be mine. She was only stickin' to you because she thought she had to, thinkin' she was married, but I 'sured her that was a mistake."

"Susan, ye said ye loved me!" hollered Bob.

He was gone.

The woman only hung her head.
"I'll never put faith in one of yer kind again," said Bob.

At that p'int I jerked him back and whispered a word in his ear, and he brightened up a bit.

"Go on with ther funeral, parson," ordered Snap-shot. "The people will git tired of waitin', if this thing is goin' to hang fire much longer. Let 'er flicker!"

So, the parson put on the finishin' touches and called 'em man and wife, and the job was done.

"Hooray!" yelled Snap-shot forthwith. "Now, then, you Cross Crick galoots, you kin kick and be hanged to ye. Susan is mine, and we offer ye our best respects; hey, Susan."

He put his arm around the woman's waist, and she hung her head.

Bob looked Gatling guns.

"You will keep your promise?" we heard Susan remindin'.

"Yes, I kin afford to keep my promise now, seein' that I have got ye safe. Hello, McReilly?"

"Right hyer," said the mayor.

"Will ye let these hyer two galoots go, if I withdraw charges?"

"If you will take the risk," said the mayor.

"Let 'em go without their guns."

"Well, if you say so."

"That is what I do say. That is one of the conditions Susan imposed on me, that I should let 'em go. She has got a tender heart, has this same Susan."

He gave her another squeeze, and she hung her head a little lower as he done so. Anybody would 'a' thought she was a blushin' little damsel in her 'steens, rather than a widdy fat and forty.

Bob was lookin' at me in wonder and amaze.

"Et is all right," I told him in a whisper. "Say nothin', but saw wood."

So we both held our peace to see what would come of et.

"You hear what has been said?" asked the mayor.

"We ain't deaf," said I.

"Wull, if I let ye out we don't want no more attempts at murder—"

"We are innocent of that," declared Bob. "We didn't fire that shot, that I kin swear to."

"That don't go, seein' that there was a empty shell in yer gun."

"Et is the gospel fact. That shot was fired at Plug Collins' yaller dorg, over to Cross Crick, two days ago—and he never once kicked."

"That is so," I chipped in. "I remember the circumstance well. It will be in the Howler this week; I reckon it is already up in type. That is proof of the statement."

"Et is if ye don't lie," said Snap-shot.

"Don't make no more trouble, Sam," said the mayor.

"All right, let it drop."

"And you want 'em freed?"

"Yes, let 'em go free, and let 'em see how we do things hyer at Wagonpole."

"And let 'em report the hull night's doin's fur the Howler," some feller in the crowd chipped in.

"That is jist what I'll do," I answered him.

"Well, boys, you kin go free," said the mayor, "under the sarcumstances, but take good keer that no further suspicion falls on ye, that's all. And you had better start early fur home."

"But we want to see et out," I minded him.

"Well, carry yourselves straight, then."

He allowed us to walk out, at that,

and the hull shootin'-match went off in the direction of the big hotel, where a dance was to be had in honor of the event.

Me and Bob brought up the tag end.

"What does et all mean, Cy?" he asked me.

"It was the widdy's dodge to git you out of jail," I answered him.

"But what good does that do me?" he demanded.

"Why, ye are out, ain't ye?" said I.

"And she's gone and married the other feller," said he.

"Has she?" said I.

"Ain't she?" said he.

"She believes that she was married hard and fast to you, and that this second one don't go."

"How do you know that?"

"By the note she sent."

"Ha! That's so; what was in et?"

He had been so plum dazed that he had forgot the note fur the minnit.

"Why, she said that she was puttin' up a job to git you out of the jail. While the fun is goin' on, we are to git ready our hosses and hide 'em handy, with one fer her—"

"Ye don't say!"

"That is jist what I am sayin', ain't it?"

"Well, go on."

Bob was as happy as a school boy.

We wur talkin' low, so that nobody could overhear what we wur sayin'.

"Wull, then we are to go into her house the back way, onseen, and go to a room she mentions, and thar wait. When she and Snappy comes home she will send him up ahead, and there we are to nab him. See?"

"And you kin bet yer boots that we will nab him, too!"

"Ef he don't snap us."

"We'll resk that, Cy. Bless that ar' woman, she does love me, pard, and I would wade through fire to git her, now. It is my first, last and only chance fer a wife in this world, and I must embrace et."

"Likewise the woman," said I.

"Ditto," said he.

CHAPTER XIII.

SNAP-SHOT'S THREAT.

So, they all marched back to the camp centre.

The musicians beat their pans and kittles and what not, and the lights made a grand display.

Besides that, Snap-shot had passed the word that the fireworks might now go on, and there was a great big whoopin' time all over the camp.

Me and my pard acted jist as if we wasn't in et.

And we wasn't.

The saloons was doin' a rushin' business, and the results wur beginnin' to be apparent all around.

Me and Bob had somethin' else to think about, and matters had taken sich a turn since our comin' thar that we had been forced to abstain from the flowin' bowl.

"I wonder who did fire that shot at Sammy?" Bob asked me.

"I thought et was Susan," said I.

"You ar' mistaken thar."

"You think so?"

"Sure of it."

"Why?"

"No motive, and she ain't that kind of a gal, anyhow."

"Motive enough, if she wanted you and he was in the way of her gettin' you."

"Don't believe et, pard. This is her

game to git me. If she had tried that other she would most likely tried et again."

"Then who did shoot?"

"Give et up. I know et wasn't me."

"No; we kin swear hard to that, fer I was thar."

So we chatted till we reached the hotel, where everything had been made ready in the hotel parlor for the dancin'.

In they pranced, them that wanted to do the light fantastic, and the moosic struck up a tune and they went at it. And outside the fireworks sizzed and banged and the crowd hooroared.

Every little while some feller would poke fun at Bob and me and ask us how we wur enjoyin' ourselves.

We answered somethin' brash, of course.

Ther bridegroom had urged the parson to stay to the festivities, but Slimpsky had perlutely declined.

He had had enough he allowed, and he took his hoss and started off into the night jist as soon as he had finished his business, not much carin' where he went so long as he got out of Wagonpole.

Me and Bob lingered around fer a spell, not to seem unduly hasty in our departure.

By 'n' by when the moosic stopped again, I made bold to announce that we would be goin'; not that I s'posed anybody would care, but I wanted to give the bride the tip.

Whose bride she actooly was, hang me ef I knowed.

She looked up when I said et.

I gave her a sign.

"So soon?" she asked.

At the same time her eyes told me et was time.

"Yes," said I, doffin' my hat and bowin' to her, "we must be off, Mrs. Snap-shot. I want to do it bang-up fer the Howler."

"And see that ye don't omit anything, either," said Snap-shot.

"It shall have a full report," said I.

"But, hold on," said he. "Ye can't go without drinkin' to the health of the bride. Trot out the best ye have got, landlord. Set et up fer the hull crowd, with a special bottle this way!"

That was somethin' I didn't like.

I seen by the way that Bob backed off that he didn't like et, either.

On his part, I take et that he couldn't bring himself to drink with a sworn enemy, as he looked on Snap-shot.

For my part, I couldn't drink social with a man that I was goin' to lend assistance to dump within an hour or two. I am white and honest, whatever my other failin's.

"No, I thank ye, but I can't," says I.

"Nur me," said Bob. "I don't want to drink with ye, Snap-shot."

"What! What's that?"

So hollered Snappy, and he looked as snappy as his name, too.

"You put us in jail, and I don't feel none too friendly," said I. "I guess I won't take any."

"And you wrong accused me," said Bob, "and I be hanged ef I will drink with ye! Besides that, you have cheated me of a woman who was honest mine."

Snap-shot looked hot.

"Goin' to hold grudge, be ye?" he said.

"We ain't goin' to chum with ye, anyhow," snarled Bob.

"And ye won't drink the health of the bride?"

"Not a bit! You wouldn't 'a' done et when she was my bride, would ye, now?"

There had been considerable drinkin', as said, and Snap-shot had been doin'

his share of it, and he was in no gentle mood if he got riled.

And he was easy to rile when he was in likker.

"She never was your bride," he declared.

"Not more'n two hours ago," said Bob.

"I say she never was."

"We won't discuss et," said Bob, takin' my pull at his elbow and knowin' what et meant.

"No, but we'll drink et!" hollered Snap-shot. "No two galoots from Cross Crick kin come over hyer and 'sult me to my face. Pard, lock them doors!"

He had got out his guns.

Some of his friends hastened to obey him.

And thar we wur, hemmed in like a pair of darn rats in a trap.

What was goin' to be done about et? I looked at Bob and he looked at me.

Et looked as if we would have to drink to the health of the bride, whether we wanted to or not, and there wasn't much use kickin'.

We had lost our guns, ye know.

Even ef we hadn't, Snap-shot had the drop on us.

And he was jist warm enough to be ugly if we provoked him too far.

The treat was by this time goin' around, and the private bottle and the glasses had been fetched.

Snap-shot ordered the landlord to pour out a bumper, the which same he done, and then he ordered my pard to drain et to the last.

He had us about where he had the parson a spell before.

Bob shook his head, but et wasn't no use, he had to take his medicine all the same.

Not that Bob would 'a' kicked under any circumstances, fer I knowed he wouldn't, but there was no use kickin' thar.

Still he hung back, and ther widdy—that was, fearin' no doubt the result of a horn like that, sorter coaxed Snap-shot to let us off easy, but Snappy was sot.

"I'm doin' this, Susan," he declared. "They shan't insult ye by refusin' to drink yer health."

"But, Sam, what do I care whether they do or not?"

"Et's me that cares," hollered Sam. "Hyer, you galoot, drink et!"

With that he popped his gun right under my pard's ear, and that settled ther business.

Sam had no further objections to offer, but he guv me a sly wink as if to say he was dyin' to git et, but wanted to be coaxed.

Well, Bob had to take his medicine, and then I had to take mine.

And it didn't stop at that, fer hang me ef he didn't pour another bumper fer Bob, and I knowed ef he took that he would git corned.

And if that happened it would be all up with Susan's skeem.

Susan turned pale.

"No, thank ye," said Bob, seeing the situation in its true light. "I ain't no hog," says he.

"Besides, we have got to git home to write up these hyer festivities, ye know," I reminded him, easy-like, so that he would be mollyfied. But et did not work.

"And I mean to give ye somethin' to write about," said Snap-shot. "I want ye to set forth jist how amazin' well we treated ye over hyer. Say ye had all the stuff ye could put into yer skins, jist as free as water, and what a bang-up good time ye had. Come, now, jist once more to Susan's health, and then once to mine!"

CHAPTER XIV.

SUSAN'S HAND SHOWN.

Thar we wur.

We wur in a bad fix, and knowed et.

Ther widdy—that was, she knowed et, too, and looked distressed.

Her skeem all depended on me and Bob, and if we got corned what was to become of her?

She would be anchored fer life to the man she hated, as I could plain see, while the man she loved—unless she lied, would forever mourn her.

"We have got to git," said Bob.

"And it is night," said I.

"Strange roads," said Bob.

"And no moon," said I.

"Makes no difference!" hollered Snap-shot. "You have heard what ye have got to do, and ye had better do et, quick!"

"That's what's the matter!" hollered some of his friends. "They kem hyer to have fun, let 'em have et, Snap-shot. Make 'em down with et, every drop of et!"

"Jist what I intend," said Snap.

"But, we are full," said I.

"Full as ticks," said my pard.

"We'll git plum corned," said I.

"And that won't never do," said Bob.

"We are prohibitionists!"

"Besides," chipped in Susan, with a sudden thought, "you are not doing your part, husband."

Sam 'peared to like that word.

"What is that?" he asked her.

"You are not drinking with them."

"Well, that's so, by gashen. Hyer's to ye!"

He drained that one himself, and Susan looked pleased and guv me a wink.

I understood her game.

If Sam was bound to fix us, she was bound that he shouldn't escape himself.

"Now then," said he, havin' filled et again, "your turn."

"Had all I want," said my pard, back-in' off.

"Fetch him up hyer, pards," hollered Sam.

Willing hands seized us both, and we wur braced right up to the fore, and Sam poked a gun at each of us.

"Susan's health," he ordered, plain and simple.

Others behind us put guns behind our ears, too, jist to back up Sam, and we had to do as ordered.

You-Bet Bob put et to his lips and drained et, and then I had to foller suit with one jist like et, and Snap-shot was laffin' to split.

"Now, then, once to me," he said.

"No, no, we'll plum bust!" I cried.

"Can't help et if ye do," said he.

"Then they can't write us up," said Susan.

"Then we'll go unwrit," said he.

"We'll shur git killed goin' home," said I.

"And we'll never forgive ourselves fer that," said Susan.

"You ain't doin' et, et's me," said Snap-shot. "Come, now, what are ye goin' to do about et?"

His gun kem an inch nearer to our noses, and the others pressed us harder behind the ears, and it looked as if it was drink or die, then and thar, and so we drunk.

"Thar, now ye kin bow and retire," said Snap-shot. "Next time ye come to a weddin' to Wagonpole, don't think ye are goin' to run it all yer own way and carry off the bride."

"We wish ye dead loads of joy," said I.

"And long life," said Bob.

"There!" cried Susan. "Ain't that nice, Sam?"

"That will well do," said Snap-shot.

"Then you orter drink their partin' health, after makin' them drink your'n."

"Do ye think so, Susan?"

"Would I say so if I didn't? I want my husband to be all-around white."

"Wull, if you say so, all right; but don't blame me if I git a trifle onstiddy in the legs if I do."

"This only happens once in a life time," said Susan.

"Sometimes twice," some feller stuck in.

He 'minded her of the late lamented Budd McKorkle.

She didn't notice it, though, but paid her 'tention to Snap.

He took his dose like a good feller and wiped his chops on his shirt sleeve.

"Kin we be allowed to depart in peace, now?" I asked.

"And take with us what we have got?" asked Bob.

"Yes, now ye kin go," said Snap-shot. "My blessin' go with ye. You ain't so bad after all. It was that parson done the mischief, or kem near to et; but he had to make that right, you bet! Hey, Susan?"

He chuckled her under the chin.

His face was red with what he had took, and he wobbled some.

Susan motioned sly fur me to hurry, and so Bob and me backed off to the doors and bowed ourselves out.

"Cy," said Bob, then, "what is goin' to be done?"

"Come out hyer and I'll show ye," said I.

"What dy'e mean?" said he.

"Come on and see," and I took him by the arm.

He was awful unstiddy, and I knowed by the way I felt that we wur in a bad way.

Gettin' him down off the piazzzy and out of the side of the house, I told him to open his mouth jist as wide as he could.

Wonderin', he obeyed.

As soon as he opened, I rammed my finger down his throat clear up to the hilt, so to say.

Et seemed as if I got down below his waistband, and he was prompt in respondin' to the call, now I tell ye. And he was so mad that he served me the same way.

Et was all that saved us.

We wur plenty gone yet, but we had cut off the supply.

What part of the stuff hadn't done the business already, never would, we knowed that.

"Now then, what?" said Bob.

"Revenge," said I.

"I wish I had a gun," said he.

"We ain't even got a toothpick," said I. "But, then, that ain't what I mean. We don't want to get into no trouble hyer, Bob. We wouldn't stand no show at all."

"I guess not," he agreed.

"We are in the camp of the Phillistines," said I, "and we have got to go stiddy till we git out again."

"That is more'n we are doin', this minnit," he punned.

"We are doin' the best we kin," said I.

"Well, let's do somethin'," said he.

"And no time to lose," said I. "Let's go make sure of gettin' out our critters, the first thing we do."

"All right. And what then?"

"What the note said, and no time to lose there, either."

"Mebby not."

"I know et. Snap-shot ain't unloaded like we have, and he will be weary and want to rest purty soon. We must git thar first."

So, we hurried around to the place whur we had left our burros, and there we run plum into a feller that was holdin' a pair of beasts by their heads, and he said—

"Who be you?"

"W'at's that to you?" said I.

"Aire you the fellers from Cross Crick?" said he.

"What of et if we aire?" demanded Bob. "Is these heur our critters?"

"That's what they are," said he, "and one to spare. I am the feller what brought ye the note at the lock-up, and I have been waitin' here by order of the Widdy McKorkle."

CHAPTER XV.

GITTIN' INTO BEDLAM.

Me and Bob leaned up shoulder to shoulder while we thought fer a minnit.

Ef this was straight, then this feller was to be trusted, sure; if it wasn't straight he wouldn't been thar at all, and wouldn't knowed anything about the note.

"Et must be all right, Bob," said I.

"I reckon et is," said Bob.

"Sure it's all right," said the feller with the critters. "I am to take these hyer beasts up to the head of the gulch, and wait thar fer you to come with ther widdy."

"What d'ye call the head of the gulch?" I asked him.

"The way you come in," said he.

"All right," said I. "You go up thar and wait, and ef you don't see us it won't be our fault."

So he went off quiet, leadin' the critters, takin' a round-about way so as not to be seen, and me and Bob sot forth in the direction of the McKorkle domicile.

Arrivin' thar, we went around to the back door, as the note had told us to do.

Bob suddenly caught my arm.

"What is et?" said I.

"We want weepins," said he.

"Shur," said I.

"Whur will we git 'em?"

"I dunno."

"Got to have 'em."

"Can't do nothin' without 'em."

We thought hard, fer it was a nut to crack.

Ef we went away to look fer guns we might be too late when we got back, and if we stayed without guns we might git downed.

"Which shall et be?" I asked him.

I looked at Bob and Bob looked at me, what we could see of each other in the dark.

We both understood the situation.

"We are two to one," said Bob.

"Shur," said I.

"And Snap-shot is likely to be nearer corned 'n what we aire."

"Most likely," said I.

"Then let's stay and tackle him, and see how we'll come off."

"All right, if you say so."

"Besides, the widdy is on our side."

"Not much widdy about her now," said I, "seein' she's married to both of ye."

"No matter, long as ye know who I mean."

"Then we'll risk et?"

"Shur."

That settled, I tried the door.

It was onfastened, and I opened et and went into the darkened kitchen.

"Now," said I, "we had orter read this hyer note again, so as to make no mistake as to the room. We must have a light."

"That's so," agreed Bob.

"We don't want to make no mistake now."

"Not on yer life. Let's feel around fer matches. Must be some hyer some'r's."

We begun ter feel.

The first thing I knowed I had run my head into a dinner pot that was hangin' on a hook or nail.

I made a frantic reach to save myself, but that pot slipped off its fastenin' and thar I was gropin' around in the dark with a helmet of iron adornin' my cabeza.

About that time I heard a terrific din and racket in the direction of Bobbert.

Et sounded like a wash-b'iler havin' a dizzy waltz with a pianner, and I heard Bob let off a string of bad words that would have shocked a parson.

"What is et, Bob?" I asked him.

My voice sounded in my ears like I was cribbed in a barrel.

"I have stumbled into a b'iler and upset the blasted old stove, or somethin'," said he.

I was trying to get off that dinner pot.

It was one of a queer shape, by the feel of et, and it was a wonder to me that it hadn't tooken my nose off when it went on my head.

"Whur are ye at, Bob?" I asked him.

"Durn ef I know," he answered.

"Wull, find me and uncover me," said I.

"I am tryin' some frantic to uncover myself," said he.

"We are in a fix," said I.

"We are in hot!" said he.

I agreed with him on the p'int.

"Well, stand still," said I, "and I'll come to whur you are at. You kin then unhang me, and I'll try to rescue you."

"All right, come on," said he.

His voice sounded fur away.

I had located him, as I supposed, and I started forward.

The next thing I knowed I was barkin' my shins over some unknown article of kitchen fixin's.

"Thunder'n Mars!" I hollered right out. "Et's a wonder that woman wouldn't 'a' put all her worldly possessions into this one room, and done with et."

"Et looks like she had," said Bob.

"Whur are you?"

"Hyar."

I had located him wrong, et seemed.

Takin' another trail, I sot out fer him again, and that time I went head-long over a washtub.

But I found Bob.

That dinner pot on my head went plump into his stummick, or region tharabouts.

He let out a howl instanter.

I cussed some, but nobody heard et but myself, I reckon.

There was a scramble, and the way we rattled that stove, and banged the boiler, and whanged that dinner pot and other things was a caution.

Bob was fightin' mad.

I felt him grab the front of my shirt, and then somethin' kem spat! against that dinner pot.

Knowin' he had holt of me in front, and judgin' whur my face had orter be at, he had pasted one at my phiz with his first.

He howled instanter.

I knowed what had happened.

"Ye would, would ye?" I cried.

With that, I let out one at him.

"Wough!" I yowled the same instant.

I had knucked the corner of the stove.

"Git up!" said he.

"I can't," said I.

"Why not?"

"My head gear is hooked some'r's."

"Consarn yer head gear! Git up off'n me, I tell ye!"

With that he riz up under me, and that pot stopped with a jerk that almost dislocated my neck.

I judge now that the handle of it, danglin' under my chin, had fouled with some part of the stove, but I didn't know et then.

That bein' the case, he was tryin' to lift me and the stove and the whole shootin-match at once, which he couldn't easy do, and the recoil was sudden.

"Git off!" he yelled.

"I'm fast!" I answered.

"You are a fool!" said he.

"I acknowledge the corn," said I.

He struggled and riz and fell and kicked; and I did likewise, but et wasn't no use.

Fer all our efforts we couldn't fetch loose, and et must 'a' been like a little bedlam to anybody that had been thar to listen to et all. I hoped and prayed that the weddin' party wouldn't arrive jist yet.

CHAPTER XVI.

THER BRIDE AND GROOM COMETH.

I was gittin' plenty tired.

And I reckon et was the same with Bob, too.

We both ceased our strugglin' about the same time, and I said:

"Bob, this hyer won't do; we are in a fix, and thar's no use our actin' like a pair of Kilkenny cats."

"I opine you aire right about that," he moaned in return. "I thought you was doin' it a-purpose, that was what I thought, and I wasn't goin' to have et."

"You blame fool!" said I. "Do you think I would fit a dinner pot over my head and then go explorin' around through Hades in the dark to feel what kind of a place et was? Not hardly!"

"Wull, try to roll off and lift me up."

"I mebbly kin roll off, if you will let me," said I, "but as to liftin' anything, I couldn't lift my voice."

I made the effort and rolled off'm him.

But, glory to goshen! I didn't stop rollin', but went thumpety plunk down a flight of stairs.

That dinner pot banged every step all the way down, et seemed to me, and the wonder was that it didn't twist my head off and have et already potted fer soup.

I seen more stars than are contained in the firmymint.

"What's up?" asked Bob.

"Spades!" I answered him, absent-minded.

"Turn et down," said he, thinkin' I was jokin'.

"You want to go et alone?" I asked him, grim humorous.

I didn't feel that way, by mighty, I didn't! I was done up fur fair.

"Whur are ye at?" he asked me.

"In the sullen, I reckon," said I.

"Are ye alive?" said he.

"No; dead," said I.

"We have got to git out of this," said he.

"Jist what I'm eager to do," said I. "Don't you move till I do git out, or you will come down a-top of me."

"Is the door open?" asked the blame fool.

"No, et's closed," said I.

I was tryin' frantic to lift that pot off'm my head.

The more I tried, though, the tighter et stuck, and I wondered what in creation I was goin' to do.

While I was strugglin' and frettin' and fumin', and mebbly cussin', what should

I hear but a turrible clatter, and down kem that wash b'iler.

Lucky fer me that I had moved away from the foot of the steps.

Then there was a turrific yell, and a loud thumpin' and bumpin', and I knowed et was Bob follerin' suit.

If the stove had folloed him I reckon et would been all up with him, but lucky et was the stove had better sense and remained whur et was at.

Bob struck the bottom with a force that made him grunt.

"Are ye thar?" I asked him.

"I wush I had a gun!" he panted.

"What fur?" said I.

"Ter shoot you!" he snarled at me.

"And what would ye do that fur?"

"You told me that door was shut."

And hang me ef he hadn't believed et! I laughed myself into somethin' of a good humor.

"How d'ye think I could shut et when I didn't know a door was thar till I got into et?" I asked him.

"Then what business had ye to lie to me?" he demanded, red-hot.

"To answer a fool question," said I.

He was rip-ravin' mad, and when he found he hadn't no bones broken he begun to prance around that sullen like wild.

In about two seconds and a quarter he kerplunked his head on a beam and seen fire enough to enable him to read that note by, if he had only thought of et in time.

Somethin' had to be done.

We wur wastin' time.

"Set down, ye blame idiot!" I holloed at him.

"Jist what I am a-doin'," he answered in subdued tone. "I'm settin' hard enough."

That knock had floored him.

"I hope it knocked some sense into ye," said I. "Now if you kin do et, jist set still till ye hear me say somethin'."

"Say et," said he.

"We aire hyer to win a bride."

"Great Scott!" he shouted. "We'll be late!"

"Keep yer shirt on," said I. "We have been makin' too much haste, and that's what's the matter."

"But, I will lose Susan!" he pleaded.

"Not much loss to her, ef ye do," said I.

"You are unfeelin'," said he.

"I hope I have got hoss sense yet, anyhow," said I.

"You have never been in love," he whispered, soft as could be.

"And I never want to be," said I.

"You ain't goin' back on me, are ye?" he demanded.

"Not if you will git this infernal cookin' pot off'm my head," said I.

"Wull, hold plum still till I kin find ye," said he, "and I'll try et. We have got to get out of this fix, or we are goners."

"You are right," said I.

Wull, he found me, and when he took holt of that pot I thought he would take my hull head off.

"Let up!" I holloed. "Let up! Are you tryin' to dislocate the spine of my back? The blame thing must be on there to stay."

"I reckon et is," he agreed with me.

"Can't you do et easy?"

"Don't believe I kin do et at all, ef et wouldnt fetch loose that time," said he.

"Well, don't try et again, then," said I, with regard fur my feelin's in the matter. He had about dislocated my face as et was, and I didn't want any more of the same.

"What is to be done?" he urged.

"Give me yer ear, and I'll tell ye," said I.

"Take 'em both," said he, "ef et will do any good. We must rescue my Susan!"

"Don't ferget that possession is about nine p'int in law," said I. "At the present moment she is somebody else's Susan."

"Stop foolin'," he urged, "and tell me what to do."

"I ain't foolin', not a bit," said I. "And as to tellin' ye what to do, I want first to read ye a chapter on what not to do. I am not carryin' any insurance on my life—"

"Do ye want me to leave ye here?" he holloed.

"No, no, don't do that," said I. "I will come right down to business now."

"Then see that ye do, jist as quick as possible. The first thing ye know they will be here, and then what?"

"That's the question," said I.

I was some reckless, after all that had happened, and didn't much care what happened next. But, then, Bob was my pard, and he had some claims on me, after all.

"Good by," said Bob, startin' fur the stairs.

"Hold on, Bob," I called. "I will disclose my plan right off quick. We must both get up to the floor above."

"And what then?"

"You will go out and borrow a match of the first man ye meet, and I will try to get off this iron mask while you are gone."

"Well, let's hurry."

"Yes, but make haste slowly," said I.

Bob was at the stairs, and takin' the sound of his voice for my guide, I was soon there too, and we crept up.

We reached the top, and there Bob had the good luck to fall over the tub that had once before brought us to grief, and I stumbled over him, and took a header at the stove.

With moans and groans and commingled unmentionables, we tried to extricate ourselves, and while there was a lull in the tempest we heard the weddin' party approachin'. What was to be done then I didn't know. We wur dead in et—at any rate I was!

CHAPTER XVII.

SUSAN'S NEW SCHEME.

My blood ran cold.

I was as helpless as could be.

Hadn't a weapon of any kind, and my head in that dinner pot!

Bob made another frantic scramble to reach the back door and get out, but he bucked up against somethin' else.

That time it was what afterwards proved to be the cupboard that contained all the tinware of the shebang, and maybe there wasn't a din jist about that minnit!

And at that minnit, too, we heard steps and voices in the main room.

"It's all up, Bob," I whispered.

"Not if I know et!" he holloed. "Arm yerself, Cy, with anything ye kin git holt of!"

"A lot of good that will do, with my head in a dinner pot," I sneered back at him. "You will have to do the fightin' fer both of us, I reckon."

But he didn't hear me.

He had lunged into that pile of tinware again.

"Robbers! by Junipers!" I heard Snap-shot holler out above all the racket.

"It's only a dog has got in the lean-to," said Susan, so's we could hear. "You wur wrong, Snap-shot," said I, "and all we

go right up to bed, Snap-shot, and I'll tend to the dog."

"Go to—hic!—go to bed, and leave you to face the danger?" he cried in a thick way. "Oh, no, you don't ketch me doin' that, m' dear. That ain't the kind of a rooster I am."

Bob made another frantic effort to git away, and a worse din than ever was the result.

I begun to believe he was made of tin himself.

"Robbers!" holloed Snap-shot. "No dog about that, Susan. Robbers! Robbers! But, jist let me git sight on 'em, that's all!"

We heard him dash fur the door.

The woman screamed.

Galoots outside took up the cry Snap-shot had uttered.

Open went the connectin' door, and light streamed in, but all I could see was a circle of light on the floor.

Bang!

Ping!

A bullet kem kerplung against that dinner pot on my head, and if it hadn't been there I would been a dead man.

As it was, it made the pot ring in a way that almost deafened me, and I held my breath, not knowin' where the next shot would take effect, but the next shot didn't come.

The light went out.

I was quick to reason et; Susan had dowsed it so's Sam couldn't shoot to hit.

He fired again, all the same, though, but the bullet didn't do us any damage, and all the time he was yellin' robbers as loud as he could bawl, and the crowd outside was doin' the same.

They had surrounded the house.

It hadn't gone off as Susan had planned, and no tellin' how et was goin' to end.

"Light that lamp, Susan! Light that lamp!"

So Snap-shot bawled.

"I can't find a match," said Susan. "Come back here, Sam, before ye get shot!"

"Give me light," said he, "and we'll see who will git hit!"

"How many are they?" holloed a voice from without.

"Haff a dozen," answered Snap-shot.

I reckon his vision had fooled him, seein' the stuff he had punished awhile before.

Susan was tryin' to get Sam out, but he wouldn't go, but bawled fur a light, and seein' the danger I was in personally I begun to holler out that we wasn't robbers.

"Give us a show!" I holloed. "We ain't no robbers!"

"That's too thin!" holloed Sam.

"Didnt I see yer mask? Honest men don't break into houses with masks on."

I knowed et was that dinner pot.

At that minnit the back door was thrown open, and in rushed ten or a dozen fellers with torches.

Snap-shot fired again on sight, and another bullet spent its force on the outside of that dinner pot, which I was thankful I had on, after all.

That lean-to was packed full instanter.

"Don't shoot!" cried Susan. "Don't ye see who they be?"

I guessed right that she had grabbed Sam's arm, fer nothin' else would stopped him from firin' again.

And then the mob seized me and Bob hard fast.

"What does this hyer mean?" demanded the mayor of the town, who happened to be one.

"Et means that we have got into the wrong bargain," said I, "and all we

ask is to git out again and on our way home."

"They lies!" cried Snap-shot.

"That's gospel," said I.

"Whur did ye think ye wur at?" demanded the mayor.

"We wur lookin' fur our critters," I lied to him handy as I could think on short notice.

"And mistook this fur a stable?"

"Ye see, we had been forced to imbibe a good deal," I offered in excuse.

"Et don't go down," cried Sam. "Lock 'em up, mayor. They wur on mischief bent, that's what they wur."

"I can't believe et," said Susan.

"Why can't ye?" demanded Snap.

"After the generous way you let 'em go."

"Bah! they are from Cross Crick, and ye might expect anything of 'em."

He was drunk enough to be ugly, and almost drunk enough to be out of et, too.

"Somebody take this thing off my head!" I hollered. "Give me a fair show to speak out fer our side. Do ye suppose I put this on fur fun?"

"Ye meant to steal et," said Sam.

"I will take et off," said Susan, and I felt her touch et.

"No, ye don't!"

I instant felt her let go of et again.

Sam's legs showed under the rim whur I could see the floor, and I knowed he had yanked her away.

"Let him wear et," said Snap-shot. "Ef he didn't try to steal et he will know better'n to poke his nose into another man's house again."

"This is my house," said Susan.

"And I'm boss of the ranch now, I reckon," said Snap.

That kind of talk ruther made Susan mad, and she sorter bristled up and allowed she'd see.

And that jist sot Sam on edge, and he be blowed ef thar would be any seein' about et; he was boss to start with, and what he said would have to go.

Some had already grabbed my pard.

I was tryin' hard to work that dinner pot off'm my head, and I felt as if I had skinned my face all raw with et.

Rough hands wur laid onto me, too, and the mayor wanted to know of Sam if he wanted us jugged, and Sam howled right out that he did. Nobody was goin' to break into his house and not git salted fur et.

He would 'a' salted us himself, I reckon, ef it hadn't been fur Susan hangin' on to his arms.

So, the mayor ordered his men to seize us.

And we wur seized.

I felt sick at heart, to think how things had gone with us, where we had expected to have a good deal of the fun on our side.

Snap-shot laughed and shot off his mouth a good deal, and the rest of the crew, bein' about as much in pickle as he was, thought et was all a big joke, and they treated us accordin'.

They were about to lead us away, when there was a sudden crash and a thumpety-bump, and Snap-shot Sam took a header down into that open sullen, the same as I had done, save that he hadn't on no head gear to protect his cabeza, the same as mine when I went down.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"LIVED HAPPY EVER AFTER."

Et was Susan had done et, on the sly, I felt sure of that.

The door slammed down over the

hole, and Snap-shot was a prisoner in his own castle.

But it wasn't to be jist as she desired, fur Sam had too many friends in that gang, and they let out a howl that could been heard a mile.

They wur full of tarantula juice, and in no mood to see their pard handled that way.

"Off to ther jail with them fellers!" they howled.

They wur a bad lot, and I opine the mayor would have obeyed 'em, even ef he hadn't been a friend of Snap-shot's himself, which he was.

So, while some of them held Susan, some more of 'em yanked up the door and went to the rescue of Snap-shot below, and the rest of the bunch started to lead me and my pard to jail.

They had torches, and some of 'em still had pans and what not, and they made night hideous with their whoopin's.

And I still carried that dinner pot!

Some of ther boys took to throwin' stones at et, and some more begun ter shoot at et.

Bang went ther stones, and ping kem ther bullets against et, in a way that made et ring, and I was mortal 'fraid that one would go under the rim and I would git et in the neck.

I squatted as much as I could, and that stopped the shootin', fer they was afraid of hittin' somebody they didn't want to.

But they whooped and howled in a way to make ye crazy.

My pard was plum rattled.

Et looked as if et had been settled now whose bride Susan was to be, no mistake.

When they got to the jail they opened the door and shoved us in, and thar they left us to our misery, and me a-roastin' in that dinner pot.

They locked the door tight, and then with more whoopin' and yellin' they sot off to sarynade the bride and groom in their domicile, and I could hear my pard a-moanin' and a-groanin'.

"Bob," said I, "what's the matter?"

"Ter think that I must lose my Susan after all," he answered.

"If you had your cabez in a blasted dinner pot like me, you would have somethin' to complain about," said I.

But I was bound to lose that pot or lose my head tryin', and I went at et a new way.

I held down my head and shook et, and purty soon the pot guv a slip and off et went, nice as ye please.

"Thur, durn ye!" I hollered, and I guv et a kick that done me more damage'n good. "Roost on my head again, wull ye!"

"Have ye got et off?" asked Bob.

"No thanks to you," I 'torted.

"But all thanks to you that I have lost a wife," said he.

"Are you goin' into mournin'?" I asked him. "A nice thing we have got fur the Howler."

"You ain't goin' to report et jist as it happened, are ye?" he demanded.

"All 'cept the dinner pot," I answered him.

We talked away, and after a time we got cooled off a bit, and wur able to look at the thing as it really was, and we wur glad that we wur alive.

By 'n' by there kem a rap at our door.

"Wull?" I demanded.

"Have ye heard the news?"

"How do ye suppose we would hear news hyer?"

"Well, Snap-shot Sam has been shot

fur fair this time, and they have got the feller what done et."

"Ye don't say!" cried my pard.

"Fact."

"Et wasn't Susan?"

"No; et was a half-breed, and they are goin to hang him."

"And Sam is sure-enough dead?"

"Sure as kin be."

Then he went on to tell us that this half-breed had been hangin' on Sam's trail fer a good while, fer somethin' Snap-shot had done to him, and at last he had got in his work. But he was caught in the act, and there would be a hanging-bee right away.

"Too bad we ain't out of hyer," said I. "This would make news fer the Howler."

"And I would sure have Susan now," commented Bob.

Jist then we heard other voices comin', and one was a woman's, and they stopped at the door.

The feller there before 'em had dodged away, and they hadn't seen him, and we heard the woman order the man to open the door, which he done without delay.

They both stepped in, and the woman struck a light.

It was Susan and the mayor.

"Here I am!" she said, coolly. "If it wouldn't work one way it would another, Bob, and Providence has chipped in on our side. I am ready to go home with ye, now, or you kin go home with me, jist as ye please."

Never seen Bob look so tickled in my life.

They had a brief consultation about the matter, and Bob decided to go home with her.

Ye see, she owned the bungalow, and he decided to stop at Wagonpole till that could be disposed of, when he would bring his bride over to Cross Crick and set up there.

Next day there was a funeral, which I didn't stop to take in, but I hastened home to write et up fur the Howler, and you bet I done full justice to our side of the matter. Cross Crick comes out on top, usually, and always if the columns of the Howler kin make et so.

Later on, Bob moved in with his bride, and I be hanged ef she ain't quite somethin' of a woman. She kin cook to beat the band, and Bob ain't goin' around now with holes in his clothes as he used to do. Et quite puts me in the notion myself, but I haven't the nerve, and, like Bobbert, I reckon I'll have to wait till Providence chips in on my side.

THE END.

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